

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION

March
2006

ANIMATIONTM

MAGAZINE



**Toy Fair's
Top Trinkets**

**Picking Our
Best Shorts**

**The Natural Charms of
Kirikou and the
Wild Beasts**

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ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE FILM



“‘Howl’s Moving Castle’... is the perfect e-ticket for a flight of fantasy into a world far more gorgeous than our own. It turns all moviegoers into innocent kids, slack-jawed with wonder.”

Richard Corliss, **TIME**

“Admirers of his [Miyazaki’s] work, which is wildly imaginative, emotionally intense and surpassingly gentle, will find much to appreciate in this film because it demonstrates, once again, his visual ingenuity and his sensitivity as a storyteller. For newcomers to his world, ‘Howl’s Moving Castle’ is a fitting introduction to one of modern cinema’s great enchanters.”

A.O. Scott, **THE NEW YORK TIMES**

“‘Spirited Away’ won the 2003 Oscar® for best animated feature. His new film is just as magical, just as likely to make viewers feel they’ve never seen anything quite like it before.”

Kenneth Turan, **LOS ANGELES TIMES**

“★★★★★.

‘Howl’s Moving Castle,’ a masterwork on many levels, confirms that Miyazaki is one of the most brilliant practitioners of the cartoon feature form ever.”

Michael Wilmington, **CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

“Miyazaki won an Oscar® for 2001’s ‘Spirited Away.’ He should clear space for more gold.”

Peter Travers, **ROLLING STONE**

“★★★★★.

That the movie is stunningly beautiful and strangely moving is, of course, something of a given because of its inspired creator. It’s another visionary triumph in an exceptional body of work.”

Glenn Kenny, **PREMIERE**

“It’s a wartime romance, a shape-shifting fantasy, and more—dark and magical in ways that Oscar®-craving adult films should be, but rarely are.”

Logan Hill, **NEW YORK MAGAZINE**

WALT DISNEY STUDIOS PRESENTS
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A **HAYAO MIYAZAKI** FILM

HOWL’S MOVING CASTLE



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ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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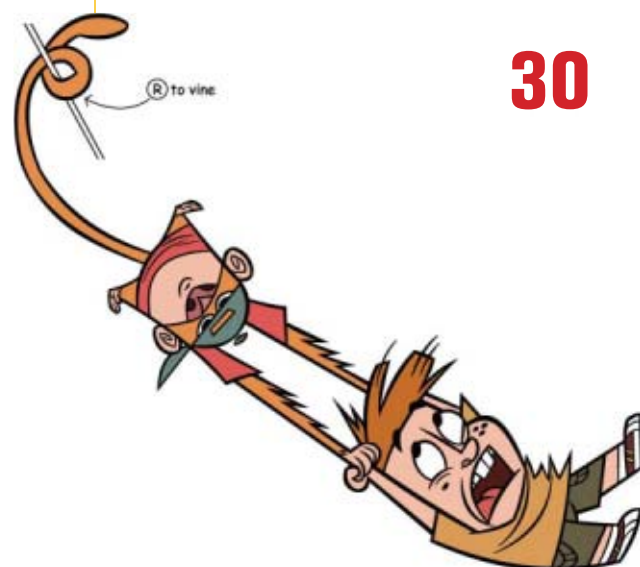
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60 A Day in the Life. Animator Mike Blum (*The Zit*) opens up his world to us.

On the Cover: Michel Ocelot's *Kirikou and the Wild Beasts* is the latest in the line of brilliant animated features from French auteurs.

Toy Fair Cover: © 2006. Marathon's *Team Galaxy* conquers the Cartoon Network universe.





So, is your head still reeling from all the huge animation developments that took place in January? The announcement that Disney's \$7.4 billion acquisition of Pixar sent ripples all over the toon world. Now that our favorite animation idol John Lasseter is in charge, almost everyone is enthusiastic about the promising change in climate at the Mouse House. Many agree with Disney topper Bob Iger who said he believes Pixar will help restore his company to its former glory days. After all, isn't it fantastic to have a brilliant animator and visionary head the studio's important toon division in 2006?

With the explosion of animation on rapidly evolving platforms, analysts are expecting more golden opportunities as new Disney board member Steve Jobs can explore synergies with his other company, Apple. In other words, if you thought iPods were big last Christmas, wait until you see what the boffins in Silicon Valley have up their sleeves this year.

Around the same time, at NATPE, preachers of the new methods of delivery were singing the praises of a world where kids can watch their favorite animated content anywhere, anytime. Someone was even talking about futuristic wearable gadgets, which can project toons directly to your eyes. Besides the obvious traffic hazards ("Friends don't let friends watch *SpongeBob* and drive"), the near future is beginning to sound like a warm inviting place to be an animator... or a die-hard animation fan, like all the readers of this publication!

Now that we're putting on our rose-colored glasses, we should also be happy about the performance of *Hoodwinked!* at the box office this past month. The fact that Kanbar Entertainment's modestly budgeted CG feature was picked up by the Weinstein Co. and was able to bring in close to \$35 million in its first three weeks at the box office gives hope to indie producers who are working on their next animated projects right now.

Finally, as we go to press with this issue, the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences has announced this year's Oscar nominees during its early morning televised session. Congrats to all the talented folks who were nominated in the animation and vfx categories. Make sure you read Ellen Wolff's excellent report on the animated short contenders in this issue! It might help you make an educated choice when picking the winner for the annual office Oscar pool.



John Lasseter

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
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Quote of the Month



"This is like seeing the Orcs being driven out of Middle-earth. I am overjoyed."

—Former Disney animator and director Will Finn, commenting on the new Disney/Pixar developments and the ushering of John Lasseter to the helm of Disney's Feature Animation, on www.cartoonbrew.com.

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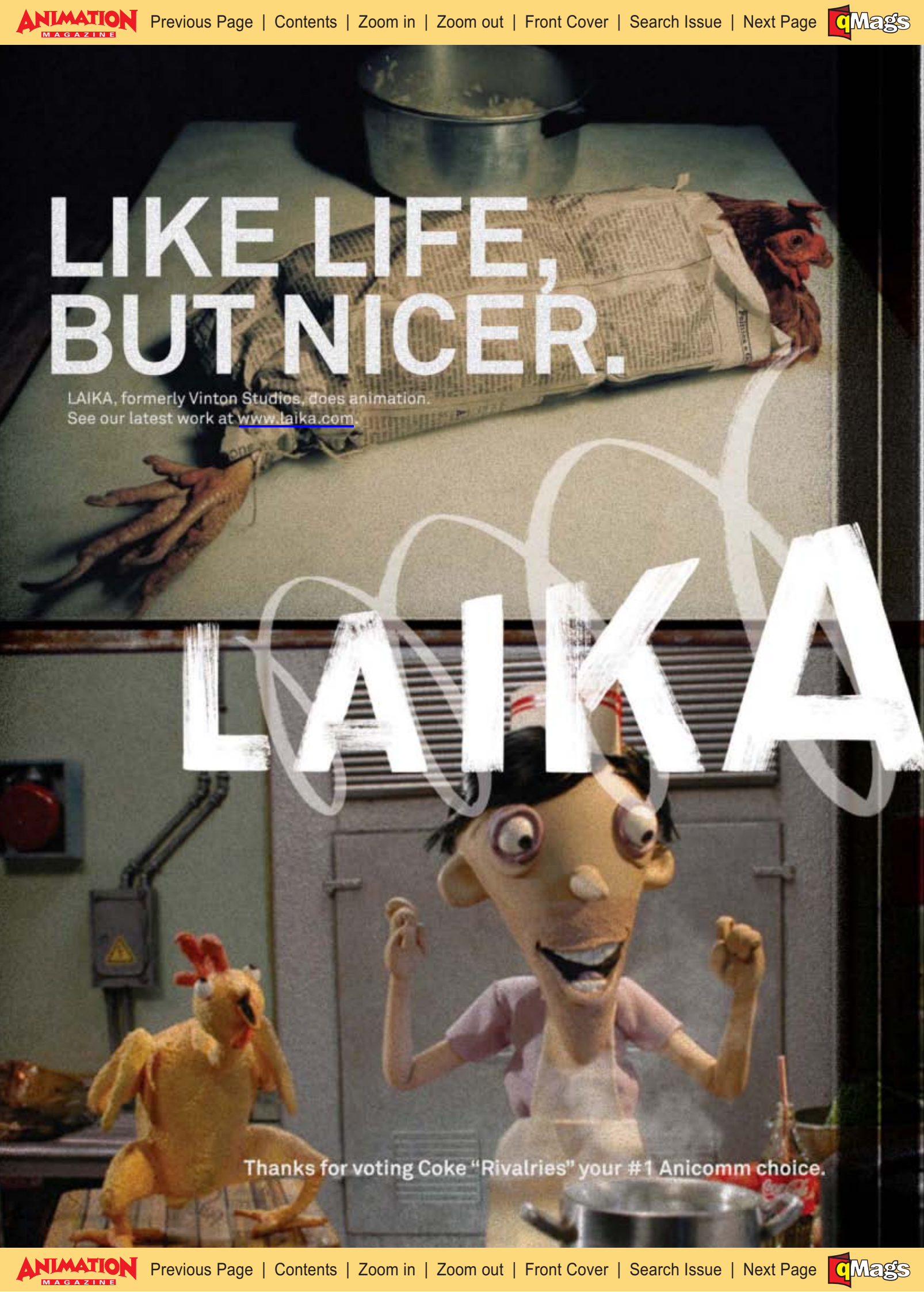
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A rooster is wrapped in a roll of newspaper, lying on a kitchen counter. A pot of food is visible in the background.

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LAIKA, formerly Vinton Studios, does animation.
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LAIKA

A cartoon character with large eyes and a wide smile is in a kitchen, holding a small object. A rooster is standing next to him.

Thanks for voting Coke "Rivalries" your #1 Anicommm choice.

The Animation Planner

March

FRAME-BY-FRAME

1-12 San Jose, Calif., Hosts the annual **Cinequest Film Festival** (www.cinequest.org).

2-5 ¡Que bien! Check out the **Animac 2006** festival in Lleida, Spain (www.animac.info).



3 Brace yourself for the terrors of **Pulse**, a new movie about a mysterious demonic wireless signal, starring Kristen Bell and Rick Gonzalez, directed by Jim Sonzero.



My Neighbor Totoro



7 It's time for another shopping spree at the DVD store: How can you say no to **Baby Looney Tunes, Vol. 1 and 2**, **Here Comes Peter Cottontail** and **The Flintstones: Complete Fifth Season**? And let's not forget an amazing triple-hitter from Studio Ghibli: **Howl's Moving Castle**, **My Neighbor Totoro** and **Whisper of the Heart**!

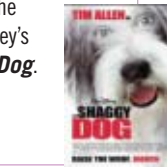
9-11 Animation producers and writers look for funding at the annual **Cartoon Movie** event in Potsdam, Germany (www.cartoon-media.be/MOVIE/1_Event.htm).



10 Alexandre Aja takes a stab at the remake of Wes Craven's **The Hills Have Eyes**. Tim Allen stars in the remake of Disney's **The Shaggy Dog**.



12 If you live in L.A., you can catch the **Oscar-nominated animated shorts** at the American Cinematheque (www.americancinematheque.com).



14 **Planetes Vol. 6**, **Pokémon Advanced Challenge Vol. 7 and 8** and **Pooh's Grand Adventure: The Search for Christopher Robin** arrive on DVD today.



17 Director James McTeigue offers a visually stunning adaptation of Alan Moore's graphic novel, **V for Vendetta**, starring Natalie Portman, Rupert Graves and Hugo Weaving. The **Hida Int'l. Animation Festival of Folktales and Fables** begins today in Takayama City, Japan (www.hida-anime.jp).



20-24 Gaming types find themselves mysteriously drawn to San Jose, Calif., home of this year's **Game Developers Conference**. While in town, they'll also have a chance to check out the **Serious Game Summit** through the 21st (www.gdconf.com).

21 If you're a fan of Warner Bros.' **Batman Beyond** and **Justice League** series, you're in luck because Season 1 of both shows is now available on DVD. Also in stores today are **Chicken Little**, **Ed, Edd 'n Eddy: Season 1, Vol. 2** and the consistently funny and outrageous **South Park: Complete Seventh Season**.



22-24 Mumbai, India, is hosting the **FICCI-Best Animated Frames Awards** (www.ficci-frames.com/frames2006/awards/baf-awards.htm). Meanwhile, back in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, fans will be lining up for the **VFX Asia 2006** confab (www.vfxasia.com).

28 The first season of [adult swim]'s clever stop-motion spoof **Robot Chicken** arrives on DVD. Other cool titles up for grabs today are **Naruto Vol. 1**, **Samurai 7 Vol. 5**, **Snoopy Come Home**, **Wind in the Willows: A Tale of Two Toads**, **Avatar: Book 1 Vol. 2** and **Jimmy Timmy Power Hour 2**.



Ice Age 2

31 Fox/Blue Sky's **Ice Age 2: The Meltdown** (directed by Carlos Saldanha) hits the big screen today. If you're in the mood for a nice chilly weather horror movie, check out **Slither**, a new pic about a slimy alien plague. The **Internet Advertising Competition Awards** takes place at www.advertisingcompetition.org/iac.

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail sgurman@animationmagazine.net

Your Handy 2006 Movie Release Guide

We thought you might want to pencil in these release dates on your calendar. Of course, studios are likely to shuffle the dates around as they please. But don't worry. Just keep reading the magazine every month, and we'll fill you in on all the changes!

Fully Animated



Hoodwinked (Weinstein Co.)	In theaters
Curious George (Universal)	Feb. 10
Doogal: The Magic Roundabout (Weinstein Co.)	Feb. 24
Mobile Suit Z: Gundam 3 (Bandai/Shouchiku)	March 4 (Japan)
Ice Age 2: The Meltdown (Fox)	March 31
Asterix and the Vikings (M6/A Film)	April 12 (France)
The Wild (Disney)	April 14
Over the Hedge (DreamWorks)	May 19
Cars (Disney)	June 9
Garfield 2 (Fox)	June 16
A Scanner Darkly (Warner Indie)	July 7
Monster House (Sony)	July 21
Ant Bully (Warner Bros.)	Aug. 4
Yankee Irving (Fox)	Aug. 25
Open Season (Sony)	Sep. 29
Barnyard (Paramount)	Oct. 6
Flushed Away (DreamWorks)	Nov. 3
Happy Feet (Warner Bros.)	Nov. 17
Meet the Robinsons (Disney)	Dec. 15
Charlotte's Web (Paramount)	Dec 20
Nocturna (Filmax)	Dec. (Spain)

Live-Action/CG Interest

Underworld: Evolution (Sony)	In Theaters
Nanny McPhee (Universal)	In Theaters
The Pink Panther (MGM)	Feb. 10
Pulse (Dimension)	March 3
Shaggy Dog (Disney)	March 10
V for Vendetta (Warner Bros.)	March 17
Silent Hill (Sony)	April 21
Poseidon (Warner Bros.)	May 5
Mission: Impossible III (Paramount)	May 5
The Da Vinci Code (Columbia)	May 19
X3: X-Men 3 (Fox)	May 26
The Omen 666 (Fox)	June 6
Garfield's A Tail of Two Kitties (Fox)	June 23
Superman Returns (Warner Bros.)	June 30
The Incredible Shrinking Man (Universal)	July 5
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (Disney)	July 7
My Super Ex-Girlfriend (Warner Bros.)	July 14
Ghost Rider (Columbia)	July 14
Lady in the Water (Warner Bros.)	July 21
Return of Zoom (Sony)	Aug. 11
World Trade Center (Paramount)	August
The Children of Men (Universal)	Sep. 29
The Reaping (Warner Bros.)	Oct. 6
The Santa Clause 3 (Disney)	Nov. 3
Casino Royale (Sony)	Nov. 17
Eragon (Fox)	Dec. 15
Night at the Museum (Fox)	Dec. 22



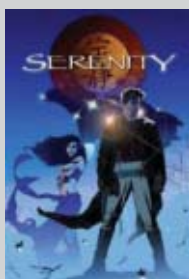
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FRAME-BY-FRAME

Books We Love

by Ramin Zahed

Feel like getting a little graphic for Valentine's Day? We can think of two new comic-book collections this month that are bound to bring a smile to the beloved comic nerd in your life. First up, there's **Serenity**, a beautiful Dark Horse paperback penned by TV and movie visionary Joss Whedon and his *Firefly* co-writer Brett Matthews. In this 104-page outing, the familiar cast of the short-lived series and the 2005 movie are on a scavenger mission to earn enough dinero to vanish for awhile. As fate would



have it, this latest job is nothing but a scheme designed by an old enemy and his covert operatives known as The Blue Gloves. The book owes its visual panache to artist Will Conrad (*Elektra*) and colorist Laura Martin (*Astonishing X-Men*) and its inventive storyline to the man who also gave us *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off, *Angel*.

You'll also get a lot of visual bang for your money if you pick up the new 216-page collection from Marvel, a heck of a package called **Marvel's Monsters**, which boasts a great cover image illustrated by Eric Powell. We have The Hulk, The Thing, Giant-Man and the Beast fighting off classic creatures such as Droom, Grogg, Goom and Grattu in the *Monsters on the Prowl* episode. Hulk also has to go mano a mano with Devil Dino in

another chapter. In a story called *Fin Fang Four*, the famous Fantastic Four meet smaller versions of their enemies Googam, Son of Goom, Elektro and Gorgilla. And that's just for starters. There are several more episodes from *Tales to Astonish*, *Journey Into Mystery*, *Strange Tales* and *Marvel Monsters: From the Files of Ulysses Bloodstone* included in this anthology. It's the kind of guilty pleasure you'll probably devour first before passing it on to your valentine on a cold winter's night. ■

Serenity (Dark Horse Comics, \$9.95); **Marvel's Monsters** (Marvel, \$20.99)



Vocal Marathon Man

Voice actor extraordinaire Rob Paulsen has a massive laundry list of accomplishments, and luckily for his fans, it doesn't look like he's slowing down anytime soon.

by Sarah Gurman

If you look up voice man Rob Paulsen's credits on the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com), you should prepare yourself to be dazzled: The man has a list of accomplishments whose length just might rival Santa's list of presents. If anything, his massive bio reflects this jack of all voices' ability to take on almost any role.

Over the course of his 25 years as an actor, Paulsen has racked up over 2,000 half-hours of animation, earning Annies in '97 and '98, and an Emmy in '99 for his stunning work as the eccentric lab rat Pinky from *Pinky and the Brain*. In addition to his pitch-perfect delivery on Pinky lines like "Gee, Brain, what are we going to do tonight?", Paulsen's speech stylings have bolstered unforgettable characters like Yakko from *Animaniacs*, Carl Wheezer of *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* fame and Raphael, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle.

Interestingly enough, the former Michigan native and aspiring pro-hockey player originally considered acting as something to fall back on. But in the late '70s he moved to L.A. and started doing commercials. "As a kid, having been a singer, I was pretty good at using my voice and enjoyed cartoons like most people," Paulsen recalls. "The main place in town when I first moved here was Hanna-Barbera, and I got a few auditions and a couple of jobs here and there. One thing led to another, and I started to phase out the on-camera stuff, and for the last 15 years I've been concentrating primarily on voice work."

And he's not kidding. This season alone, he's got an unbelievable slate of characters that he makes talk the talk, including Gordon from Nickelodeon's *Catscratch*, Coconut Fred from The WB's *Coconut Fred's Fruit Salad Island*, 625 from Disney's *Lilo and Stitch* series and Rev Runner on The WB's *Loonatics Unleashed*. So how does he manage to juggle the voice boxes of an ever-optimistic coconut, an uber-honest kitty and a sandwich-obsessed experimental creature? "It sounds more impressive, I think, than it really is," the ever-humble Paulsen notes. "But, the bottom line is that it's just years of experience. I don't presume that I've reached my potential. I want to continue to get better."

With all these years of experience in the animation world, Paulsen points to the trend toward using celebrity voices in cartoons as one of the more dramatic shifts in the business. "I think there are a lot more celebrities involved now, and it's both a blessing and a curse for the average actor like myself," Paulsen says. "Most of the people who get the

press are the names that we recognize and I totally get that: It's the nature of celebrity. But more often than not you'll find that the people you recognize, certainly terrifically talented people who deserve all

of the recognition they get, quite often are hired to do pretty much their own voices."

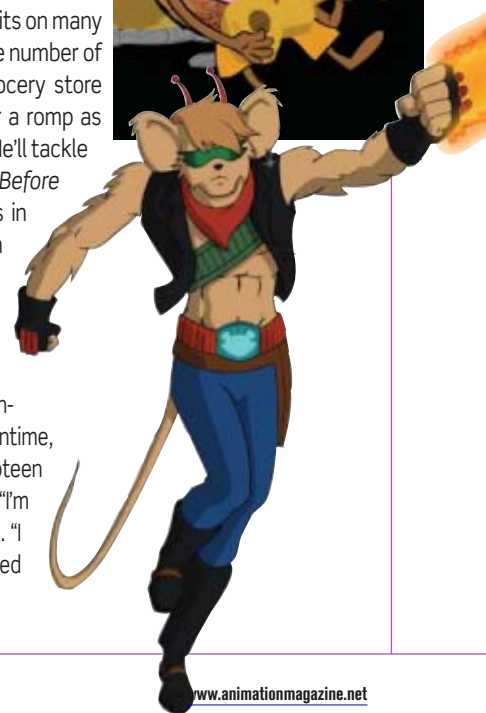
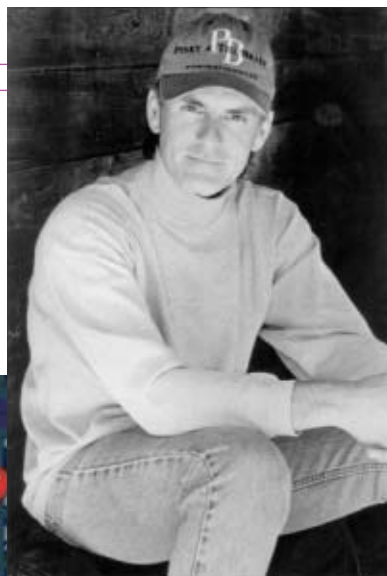
The actor also notes that the dexterity of one voice that can take on so many forms is one of the more magical aspects of his craft, bringing up names such as Nancy Cartwright, Tress MacNeille and Kevin Richardson, some of the most talented vocal thespians of our time whom you might not recognize on the street.

Paulsen's name is going to appear in the credits on many more hot projects, so it won't be surprising if the number of people stopping his "familiar" voice at the grocery store spikes in 2006. His nimble pipes will return for a romp as Throttle in the revival of *Biker Mice from Mars*. He'll tackle Spike (once again) in the lucrative *The Land Before Time* series and will also speak for characters in several feature projects including DisneyToon Studio's *Little Mermaid III*, Paramount's *Barnyard* and Warner Bros.' *Ant Bully*.

Recently Paulsen scored another Annie nom for his fab performance as the peppy Christmas elf Eubie in IDT's *The Happy Elf*, so we'll keep our fingers crossed for him on February 4. In the meantime, Paulsen will be busy providing vocals for umpteen characters, and that doesn't seem to bother him. "I'm about the luckiest man you'll ever meet," he says. "I go to work every day and get paid to do what used to get me in trouble in seventh grade." ■



A Voice for All Seasons: Rob Paulsen's golden voice has given life to famous toon characters such as Pinky (*Pinky and the Brain*), Eubie (*The Happy Elf*), Fred (*Coconut Fred's Fruit Salad Island*) and Throttle (*Biker Mice from Mars*)



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-Peter Travers, Rolling Stone

"It's a piece of genius. Johnny Depp is amazing as ever, ditto the filmmaker Tim Burton. Shot in stop-motion animation, you've never seen anything like it."

-Joel Siegel, Good Morning America

"The animation is astounding, and the story and characters are just as compelling. The visuals are dazzling and the characters vividly rendered."

-Claudia Puig, USA Today

www.warnerbros2005.com

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Daxter Flies Solo on PSP

Ready At Dawn Studios Puts Jak's wisecracking sidekick front and center.
by Ryan Ball



For the past five years, Jak and Daxter have been inseparable, serving up their own special brand of high-speed action and adventure and selling millions of units in the process. In the first game, *Jak & Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* (a.k.a. *Jak I*), the elfish risk takers disobey orders to stay away from a mysterious island and Daxter ends up falling into a pit of Dark Eco, a destructive force that transforms him into an Ottsel, a combination of an otter and a weasel. In *Daxter*, which takes place between *Jak I* and *Jak II*, he becomes something else—a hero in his own right.

While the series of hit console games were developed by Naughty Dog Studios, this fifth installment was hammered out exclusively for the Sony PSP by Santa Ana, Calif.-based Ready At Dawn Studios. This is actually the first title produced by the company, which was recently founded by Didier Malenfant, Andrea Pessino and Ru Weerasuriya. Malenfant worked at Naughty Dog as a senior programmer on the first two *Jak & Daxter* games, while Pessino and Weerasuriya came from Blizzard, having worked on the *Diablo*, *Starcraft* and *Warcraft* franchises.

Weerasuriya, who served as art director on *Daxter*, tells us they pitched the idea for the game to Sony in late 2003 and started development in a small room with just 5 people, cautiously building their crew as expectations for the game increased. "We knew we would need an exceptional team to pull off a game that would live up to the *Jak & Daxter* legacy, and therefore we had to be extremely selective," he says. "This sometimes led us to hold off on hiring for a particular position if the right person didn't come along, which in turn doubled some people's workload."

Since the PSP was a brand new platform at the time the project got started, the Ready At Dawn gang saw fit to write their own tools and engine, which Weerasuriya says proved to be extremely difficult when designing and developing a game in parallel. "Most people had initially ap-

proached the PSP as a handheld, but over time we found ourselves playing it as a mini-console, often over very long periods of time. We became intent on creating an action-platformer that could rival any of the ones made for home consoles and to achieve that on a portable system was probably our greatest ambition and our principal motivation."

With *Daxter* rising to hero status, Ready At Dawn sought to introduce gamers to a new side of the character, making him more driven and determined. The game's animator, working in Maya, also worked on making his animations as natural and as smooth as Jak's, while keeping his unique ottsel characteristics in tact. "Although Daxter is at most times a biped, his motion needed to be quick, agile and more animalistic," Weerasuriya notes. "For example his swatting combo transitions from an initial biped attack to a swift and fluid, almost feline, motion for his finishing moves. We further enhanced this by creating Daxter's 'ottsel' mode, which is completely based on his quadruped abilities."

Weerasuriya says one of the coolest aspects of the game is Daxter's dream mode, a series of mini-games in which Daxter takes on the personae of his personal heroes, which include martial arts experts and powerful wizards. "These sequences gave our game animator free reign to do pretty much anything he wanted without constraints and expand Daxter's already vast move-set. We ended up with sections of gameplay that are visually very striking and extremely addictive."

Gamers are sure to get addicted when *Daxter* hits retail for PSP in March. If you dig it, you can look forward to more PSP titles coming out of Ready At Dawn Studios, which is located on the web at www.readyatdawn.com ■





Cartoon Network on air branding. Design, 3D environments & animation by Animal Logic. www.animallogic.com Sydney | LA



Get Your Game on at GDC 'o6

by Ryan Ball

As the next generation of video games is beginning to roll out, the 2006 Game Developers Conference should be one of the industry's most exciting events in years. After a brief detour to San Francisco, the annual show returns to San Jose, Calif., where game developers from around the world will converge to share ideas on the betterment of the industry and the art form while showing off their latest interactive masterpieces.

GDC is put on each year by the International Game Developers Association (www.igda.org), a non-profit group established by game developers to foster the creation of a worldwide game development community. As they do each year, organizers have lined up a diverse offering of fun programs, informative sessions and exciting events for game professionals.

One panel discussion of particular interest to animation fans is titled "Big Screen to Game Console: Case Studies." Scheduled for Wednesday, March 22, at 2:30 p.m., the session will feature speakers from DreamWorks Animation, LucasArts Ent., Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Activision and DWA Consumer Prod-

ucts discussing the unique challenges that come with making games based on feature films. Discussion will explore such issues as managing creative direction, sharing production assets and scheduling delivery to coincide with a film's release. Participants will also touch on the impact that next-gen platforms will have on the sharing of assets between filmmakers and game studios.

Another program that's sure to draw a crowd has Brian Jacobson and David Speyrer of Valve Software explaining how they adapted their "Cabal" method of decentralized design to create *Half-Life 2*, last year's Game Developers Choice Award winner for Game of the Year. The company employed three nearly-independent design teams (art, sound and story/acting), each responsible for roughly a third of the game. The speakers will discuss the various benefits and challenges of this type of system during the hour-long lecture on Thursday, March 23, at 9 a.m.

A new feature being launched this year is The Graphic Impact art and animation competition. GDC and the CGSociety (CGS) teamed up on this initiative to support the

future of professional game art by giving artists a chance to show what they can do with next-generation tools and capabilities. Dubbed "The Pivotal Moment," the inaugural competition asked entrants to submit an image, animation and story that illustrate a crucial moment between the antagonist and protagonist.

Commenting on the contest, GDC director Jamil Moledina says, "We are excited to focus on rewarding excellence in original art, since that dovetails with the focus of the GDC to provoke creativity in all elements of game creation."

Finalists in three categories (Commercial, Team and Individual) will display their creations during the entire week of the conference and have their work judged by influential professionals from such companies as DreamWorks Animation, Midway Games and Oddworld. Winners will be announced during a VIP reception on Thursday, March 23, at the San Jose Fairmont hotel.

A major highlight of GDC is the 2006 Independent Games Festival, which will see the year's best indie efforts honored during the IGF and Game Developers Choice Awards gala ceremony on Wednesday, March 22. This year's hopefuls for the \$20,000 Seumas McNally Grand Prize for Best Independent Game are Introversion's cult action-strategy title, *Darwinia*; Ankama's strategy MMORPG, *Dofus*; Grubby Gams' puzzle game, *Professor Fizzwizzle*; Digital Eel's innovative space exploration gem, *Weird Worlds: Return to Infinite Space*; and Pocketwatch Games' ecosystem-building *Wildlife Tycoon: Venture Africa*. Nominees for the Game Developers Choice Awards have yet to be announced at press time.

The Game Developers Conference will wrap up on Friday evening with a performance of Video Games Live, an immersive concert that will have the renowned Symphony Silicon Valley and its full chorus performing music from the biggest video games of all time. The symphony will be accompanied by exclusive video footage, lasers, synchronized lighting, electronic percussionists and creative, interactive segments. The concert will take place at the San Jose Civic Auditorium on Friday, March 24 at 8 p.m. Tickets cost between \$20 and \$55, and are now available at Ticketmaster.com. ■

To register for the Game Developers Conference and review conference information, go to www.gdconf.com.

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A Thrilling Trailer

Janimation Woos *Stranglehold* for Midway.
by Mark Simon

Director John Woo is coming soon to a video game system near you. The Hong Kong auteur's latest gig is producing the third-person action/adventure Midway game *Stranglehold*, which also features action film star Chow Yun-Fat as a character called Inspector Tequila.

To launch the title, Midway went to Dallas-based Janimation studio to produce a trailer for the game. "My responsibility was to interact with our client, Midway, and make sure we were satisfying their needs," says Jeff Dates, director of the cinematic for Janimation. "Woo didn't have a lot of input into the shots other than he sort of blessed our shots to make sure he liked it, but we didn't get a lot of feedback from him. He's working more with the game elements."

"In lieu of detailed storyboarding, Janimation's lead art director Mark Moore sketched some quick boards and then we just shot a bunch of trademark John Woo scenes," says Dates. "So we basically had a live version of the entire trailer cut together with DV footage. We just ran around the studio with handguns acting the fool. It allowed us to play with timings and motion a lot faster than if we had done storyboards. We had a tight production schedule on this, about 12 weeks. We wanted to know how long it took for him to draw his gun or to kick open a door. Filming in DV was the fastest we could actually get timing immediately so we could get it all worked out."

Greg Punchatz was the character lead for the project. It was his responsibility to develop and create all the digital actors. Originally Janimation thought they'd be able to get a cyber-scan of Fat but that became an issue after his wife/manager didn't want to

release a cyber-scan which she apparently didn't like. The studio then decided to find its own visual references from his movies. (Fat's wife wanted the actor's cyber counterpart to be the same age he was when he did *Hard Boiled*, so Punchatz had to build him 20 years younger that he really is from scratch.)

Moore designed all the environments including the upstairs bar, grand hallway and the boss's lair. Midway liked the environments so much they implemented them into the game.

Since the game was just in the beginning stages of development, the trailer wasn't designed to mimic the game. It was basically created to build anticipation for the arrival of the title at a later date. "For us it was mostly making a kick-ass trailer that was a CG tribute to John Woo," adds Dates. "At E3 2005, our piece was given an award for one of the top ten best trailers at the conference. That was pretty exciting for us."

So why does Woo use doves in his films? Dates and his team of researchers think they have the answer. "Apparently every time there is a release of doves, the number of doves released represents the number of dead bodies in the film up to that point," he explains. "We mimicked that in the trailer. At the end we release eight doves and that represents the eight bodies that were killed in the trailer."

Stranglehold will be released on PS3 in the fall of 2006. The trailer is available online at www.Janimation.com.

Mark Simon is a producer, director, lecturer and author of *Facial Expressions*, *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation* and *Storyboards: Motion In Art*. His books can be found at www.MarkSimonBooks.com.



Image from *Stranglehold* trailer.



Janimation director Jeff Dates



Black and white sketches drawn by Janimation's art director, Mark Moore begin the story telling process. A combination of storyboards, live action ripomatics and a 3D layout allowed Janimation to get quick approvals in order to begin heavy production.



To define the mood of the story flow, Janimation created a color script to direct the look and feel of the environment and lighting for the 3D artists. Steve Quentin and Rares Halmagean worked with Jeff Dates to provide these illustrations to be used as a visual aid for the rest of Janimation's production artists.

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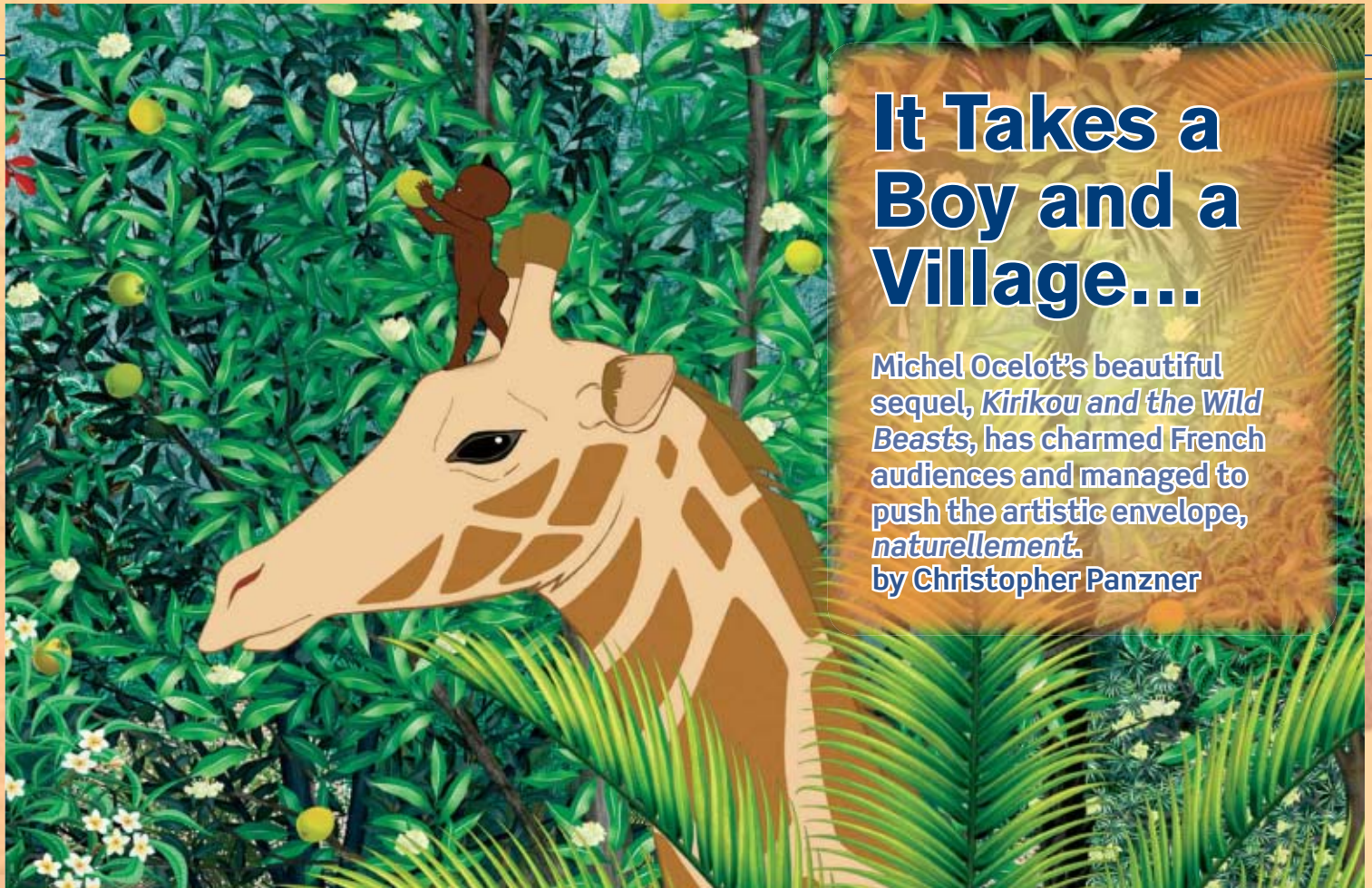
Max building rendered in a Vue environment thanks to xStream for 3DSMax MentalRay (one render pass)

"Vue's ability to generate large photorealistic environments is really going to help set the scope of our upcoming feature film, 'One Night with the King'."

Ted Fay, VFX Supervisor, Gener8Xion Entertainment



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It Takes a Boy and a Village...

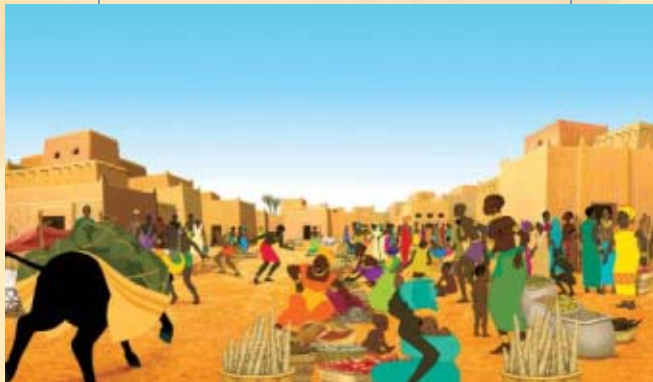
Michel Ocelot's beautiful sequel, *Kirikou and the Wild Beasts*, has charmed French audiences and managed to push the artistic envelope, *naturellement*.
by Christopher Panzner

FEATURE

Kirikou is small, but he's great. That's not only a refrain of the theme song, but if you go by what many French audiences believe, it's the truth. It's been seven years since the diminutive hero of *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (*Kirikou et la sorcière*) hit the big screen big time—putting director Michel Ocelot, executive producer Didier Brunner of Les Armateurs and French distributor Marc Bonny of Gebeka Films on the map locally and internationally, and *Kirikou* hasn't lost an ounce of his charm.

The original film was a spirited animated feature based on West African folktales about a brave boy who saves his peaceful village from an evil witch as well as a drought. The movie, released in France with 56 copies against Disney's *Mulan* and Dream-Works' *Prince of Egypt* in France on September 9, 1998, quickly went to 175 copies and broke the record for a

French animated film (in France) with 1.48 million tickets sold, a record it holds to this day. But, according to Brunner, the sequel, *Kirikou et les bêtes sauvages* (*Kirikou and the Wild Beasts*), is on track to equal or surpass that record, selling 3,000 tickets in Paris in 20 theaters on opening day. It



also went on to win 11 top prizes at animation festivals around the world, including the 1999 Annecy Grand Prix Award and a BAFTA.

When asked why he thought the first *Kirikou* movie was such a success,

Brunner says with a shrug that "this magical little character from Africa touched a nerve." What's certain is that the decision to do a sequel was less a result of commercial success than the result of fan pressure; i.e., the kids, parents and grandparents who implored Ocelot to bring his charismatic little creation back to life. And with 800,000 DVDs and 580,000 books/coloring books sold, there was no want for co-producers, distributors, broadcasters or publishers. Not to mention all the *Kirikou* tie-in toys that were on display at French stores this past holiday season.

"*Kirikou* is four stories, four books—*Kirikou and the Black Hyena*, *Kirikou and the Giraffe*, *Kirikou and the Buffalo with Golden Horns* and *Kirikou and the Lost Fetish*—all of which were included in this second film," explains Brunner. Most, if not all, of the characters from the original film reappear, with the great



Return of the Native: Based on African folklore, Michel Ocelot's and Bénédicte Galup's beautifully drawn *Kirikou and the Wild Beasts* is a triumph of traditional animation. Most of the characters from the original 1998 feature make appearances in this popular French sequel.

grandfather relating Kirikou's continued triumphs over the diabolical witch Karaba. And, of course, Kirikou saves the day and the village once again with his always unexpected but now characteristic wisdom, cunning, courage, tenderness and humanity.

The \$6.2 million (5.2 million euros) co-production between Les Armateurs/Gebeka Films/France 3 Cinéma/Studio O is based on a scenario and graphics by Michel Ocelot, the man behind the original outing. A Frenchman who grew up in Africa, Ocelot co-directed the film with Bénédicte Galup, a veteran of the original *Kirikou*, *The Triplets of Belleville* and numerous productions from the esteemed La Fabrique studio. Based in St. Laurent le Minier in southwest France, the studio has seen the likes of Ocelot, Jean-François Laguionie (*Black Mor's Island*), Sylvain Chomet (*Triplets*) and Federico Vitali (*Lava-Lava!*) pass through its doors over the years.

Two years in the making—after six months of securing the financing—the

bulk of the entirely traditional 2D animation was done by Studio Armada TMT (Vietnam) and Jet Media (Riga, Latvia) with Douanier Rousseau-inspired Adobe Photoshop backgrounds done by Les Armateurs Angoulême and scan/paint/compositing on PEGS by Spirit Productions, also in Angoulême. The project features music by global beat heavyweight Manu Dibango, Youssou N'Dour and Papa Omar Ngom.

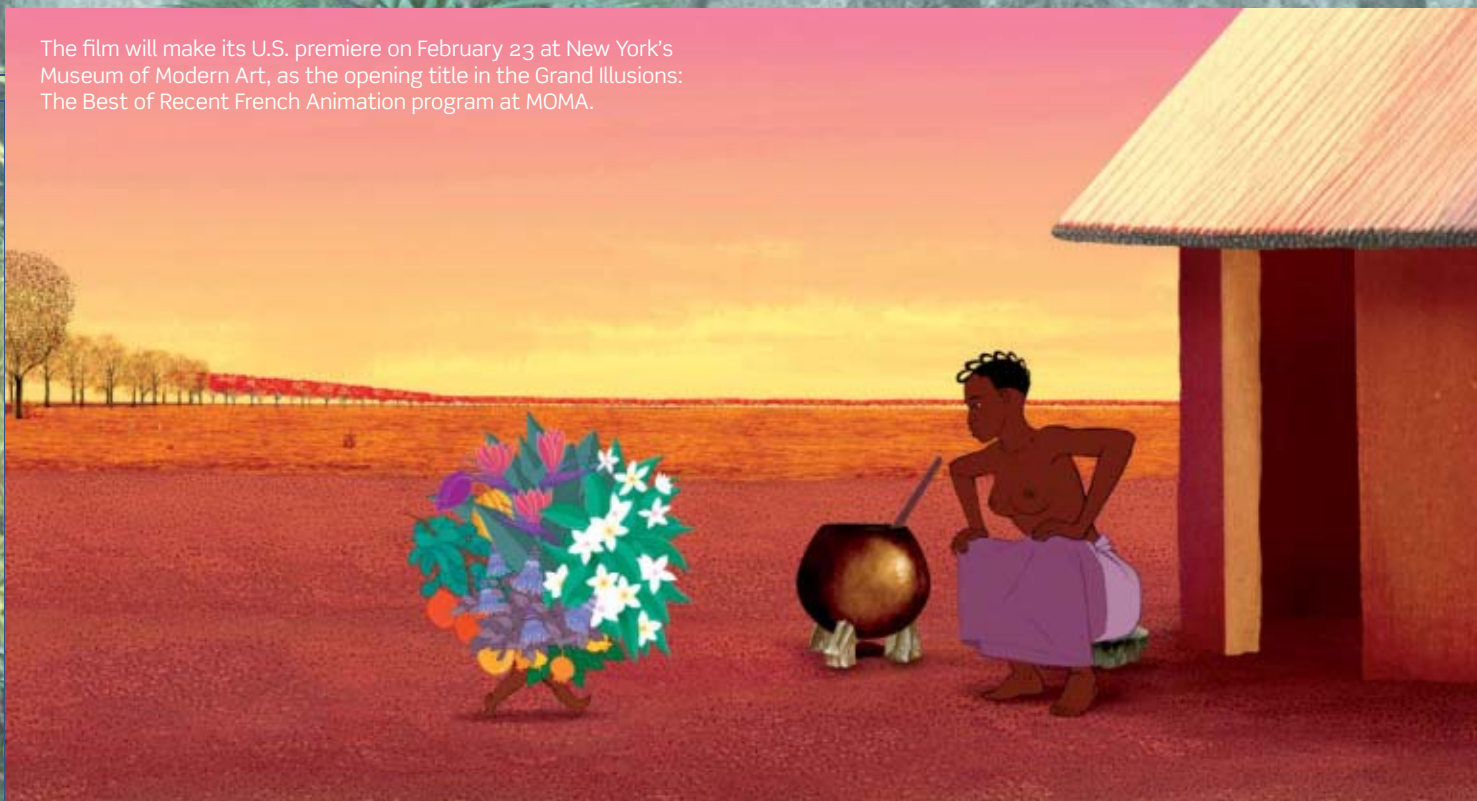
Just as the original, *Kirikou and the Wild Beasts* is unlikely to get the attention it deserves in the United States. "Celluloid Dreams is handling the international distribution. The first film (released by France Télévisions Distribution) had a very limited run in the states because of the nudity," says Brunner. "It didn't get much attention on DVD for the same reason. Meaning, it's almost certain the same situation will arise for *Kirikou and the Wild Beasts*."

"A breast shouldn't be an offensive thing," Charlotte Mickie, Celluloid's

managing director told *Variety* recently, "but given the moral climate in America, I understand distributors' misgivings!" Meanwhile, Ocelot has also reiterated that he will not change the film to appease the censors. "There's no way I'll change it," he told the trade paper. "The women in the film are dressed normally. There would be something unhealthy about 'clothing' them. It would destroy the film's honesty and beauty."

It's America's loss, but Brunner is philosophical: "I think the perspectives for animation in the coming years are excellent. Europe is becoming a real player ... it will make modest but significant contributions." For someone who exec produced *The Triplets of Belleville*, a—for all intents and purposes—silent, full-length animated feature that went toe-to-toe with Disney/Pixar's *Finding Nemo* and got two Oscar nominations (best animated feature and best music), "making it" Hollywood-style is not as important as making the films he wants to make.

The film will make its U.S. premiere on February 23 at New York's Museum of Modern Art, as the opening title in the Grand Illusions: The Best of Recent French Animation program at MOMA.



Didier Brunner

Why else would he make a film about a nude African child ... twice? Or a cut-out fable (*Princes and Princesses*), a preschool feature (*Charley and Mimmo*) or a Scandinavian folktale (*The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Bear*)?



Michel Ocelot

Next up for Brunner is a feature about medieval monks and the *Book of Kells* titled *Brendan and the Secret of Kells*, and an adaptation of Roy Lewis' *Evolution Man: Or, How I Ate My Father* (done entirely in CGI by MacGuff Ligne). Ocelot is also embarking on another edgy production, the upcoming 3D feature *Azur and Asma*, a fable centering on the

friendship between a white boy and a black boy raised by the same woman. According to the director, a woman's breasts are also featured prominently in the opening scene of the 3D movie!

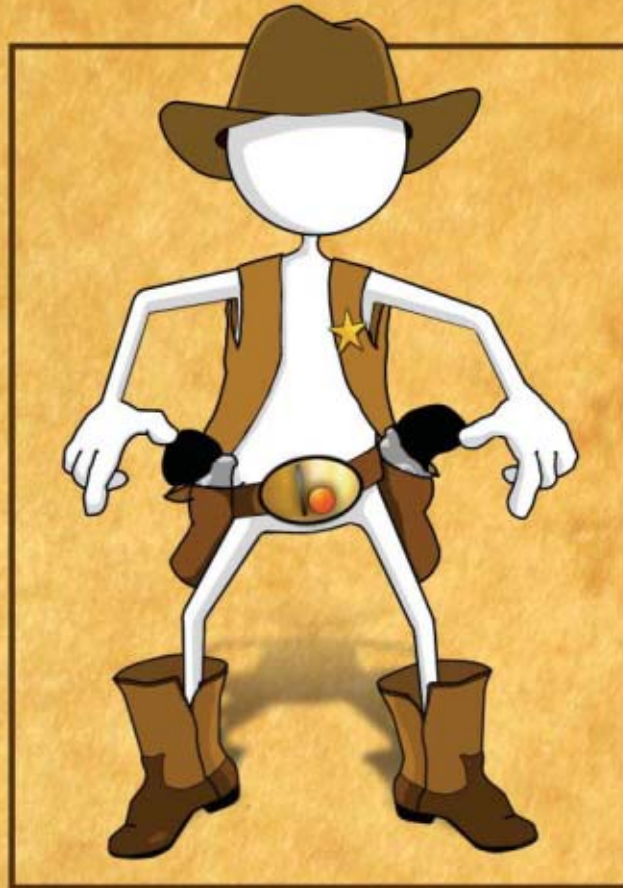
"Modest, but significant" is another way of saying "small, but great." Just like *Kirikou*! ■

Chris Panzner was recently named director of short-form programming for Discovery Channel International at the cabler's Silver Spring, Maryland headquarters.

For more info, visit www.kirikou-lefilm.com.



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Nina Paley

doesn't matter that I'm a woman producer, just that I'm a good one," says Kris Greengrove, a valued member of the Curious Pictures studio whose current project is the critically acclaimed *Little Einsteins* for Playhouse Disney. "If I were to look for something that might be a factor, I've heard it said that women are more nurturing by nature and that is certainly a necessary quality for producing. A producer needs to nurture both the project itself and all those involved in creating it. A hefty burden, but a satisfying one." She adds, "Animation is obviously still a male-dominated field and I would



Lisa Goldman



Linda Simensky



Jennifer Oxley



Kris Greengrove

Big Apple's Fantastic Toon Femmes

The women of New York's thriving animation scene are rewriting the old rules and breaking away from traditional stereotypes. **by Jake Friedman**

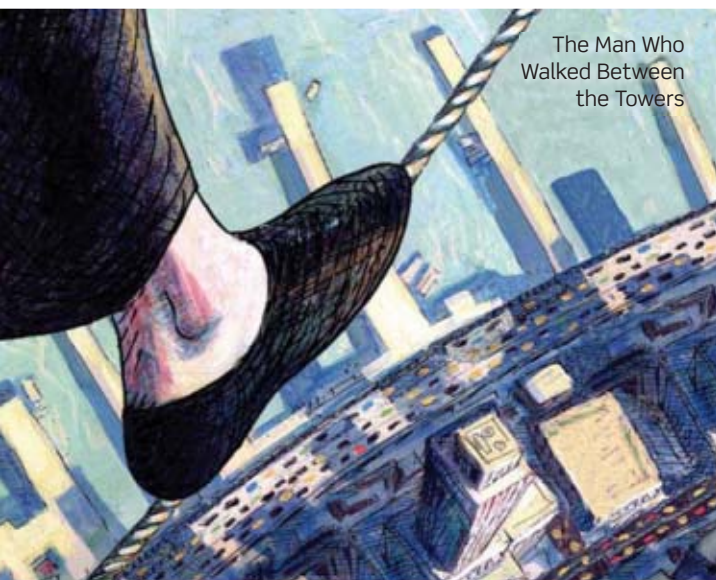
Meet Tissa David, a Hungarian-born animator who started working in New York in 1955. At a time when June Cleaver epitomized the American housewife, women in the animation studio were seen as little else than ink-and-paint girls. Of course, there were exceptions in the fields of concept design and a couple of assistants here and there, but by and large, animation coast to coast was entirely a boys' club. This is news to no one, but what's interesting is to look at the industry, specifically in New York, and see what it's like for women today, compared to David's recollections.

"You know, it's very funny," says David, who recently worked on Michael Sporn's acclaimed short *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*. "Ollie Johnston once asked me, 'How do you do that?' I said, 'I used to be a young girl at one time.' Because a man can never ever really animate a female character that's a girl, a woman."

David worked at UPA as Grim Natwick's sole assistant before joining the Hubley Studios in 1960 as an animator. She was the only woman that she knew in the entire field. "In the early '60s, there was no place for a woman. Once I called the secretary of the union, and she said 'The men are complaining that you are animating.' John Hubley didn't care, not in the slightest."

"In my experience, I have never felt discriminated against because I'm a woman," says Lisa Goldman, a freelance animation writer and story editor. Simultaneously she acts as the head of the New York chapter of Women In Animation, a nationally recognized group built to help network people in the business. "I love the animation community in New York," she says. "I find that our members are so generous with their time and talents to other members... We are recognized as a source of talent more and more. It's been amazing to be a part of all this."

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, it



The Man Who Walked Between the Towers



Curious Pictures' Little Einsteins (Playhouse Disney)

like to see more women get into it. We do have a different perspective that is not always represented in mainstream cartoons and I think it would be welcome."

When it comes to representing the main stream, Linda Simensky would know a bit about the TV toon market. She was Cartoon Network's director of programming, has been a development exec at Nickelodeon in New York, and is currently the senior director of PBS Kids programming. "Women have always worked on the development and programming sides of the television industry, so there's not really much of a difference for men and women in what I do," she says. "I think there have been many more opportunities for women, especially as the industry has grown and has come to encompass more areas than just action cartoons. I think women have become more interested in working in television animation due to the variety of shows there are now."

One such person is Jennifer Oxley, an animator by trade who has grown to be creative director at Little Airplane Productions, a studio currently establishing itself with projects like Nick Jr.'s *The Wonder Pets* series. "I have to say I haven't given much thought to being a woman in the animation industry," says Oxley. "It is true there aren't a lot of female animators or animation directors in the biz. I am definitely proud to be one of them. I guess maybe not thinking about it or worrying about it has really helped me get to where I am today." She adds, "I think there are some truly amazing fe-



Nick Jr.'s *The Wonder Pets*

male animators working in the industry today. I only wish that there were more. Women have a unique way of animating which is extremely important for a strong animation team."

But let's not limit the woman's voice to the sole action of animating. "I got into animation for fun, not money, in order to make specific films which no studio would support," says award-winning independent animator Nina Paley. Paley has been using the medium to tackle topics such as pregnancy and, most recently through her *Sitayana* films, women's strength in popular Indian mythology. "Male bosses tend to feel more comfortable working with male buddies. It only takes one insecure sexist—male or female—in an organization to start screwing things up. For the most part, the men and women animators I've met are an exceptionally cool

bunch, and I hope to see proportionally more women in studios as time goes on."

With other big influences like Dancing Diablo studio head Beatriz Ramos, top indie animator Signe Baumann and director/producer/designer/co-owner of Buzzco Studios Candy Kugel, it feels easy to be optimistic. However, most New York women who have been in the business for more than thirty years, can remember when Tissa David was the only one.

David can recall when she was considered "the loner" in the industry. "But it's never lonely," she says, "because all the characters I've ever animated are all around me." At the end of the day, there seems to be a legacy of more than just her characters. ■

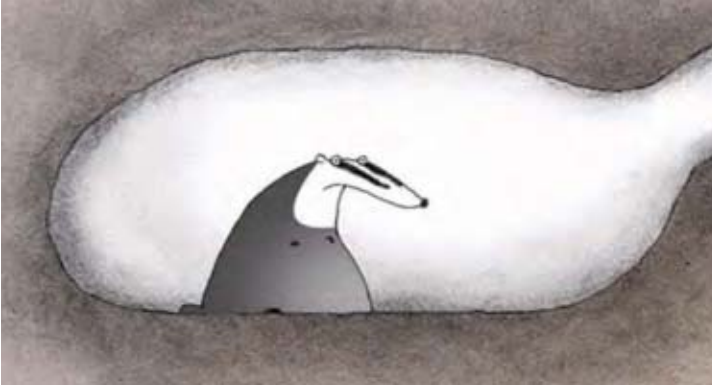
Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator. You can visit him at www.jakefriedman.net.

FEATURE



Your Guide to the 2005 Oscar Race

[Part 3 of 3]



The Final Five:

Clockwise from top left: Sharon Colman's *Badgered*, John Canemaker's *The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation*, Shane Acker's *g*, Anthony Lucas' *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello* and Andy Jimenez and Mark Andrews' *One Man Band* will be competing for the golden statuette on March 5 in Los Angeles.

broad appeal.' Usually, my films are filled with sex and violence, and that's a fairly narrow audience—boys 18 to 30!"

As a traditional animator, Plympton is happy the Academy isn't so CG-centric when it comes to shorts. He notes that several traditional pieces are in the running this year, including John Canemaker's

The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation (voiced by John Turturro and Eli Wallach).

"After three decades of making animated films about real people's lives and teaching generations of young people to tell their own stories through the art of animation, I am happy to see my own story getting such a strong response from the Academy and audiences around the world," said Canemaker via e-mail on the day the noms were announced. "Many people have approached me after screenings with their own personal stories of growing up with a difficult parent. To be included with these other fine films as a nominee reaffirms what I have always believed—that animation is a unique and powerful storytelling medium."

Among the traditional entries which didn't make the final list was an emotional favorite, Michael Sporn's 9/11 tribute, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*. Based on an award-winning book and nar-

The shorts category contenders reflect an innovative and highly eclectic period in the toon biz.

by Ellen Wolf

If you've ever wondered how small the world of animation is, the experience of veteran animator Bill Plympton sums it up. Plympton, whose latest effort, *The Fan and the Flower*, was among the 33 eligible contenders for Best Animated Short, was also a 2004 nominee for *Guard Dog*. When he attended Oscar's Governor's Ball last year, he spotted actor Paul Giamatti, (*Sideways*, *Cinderella Man*) and Plympton thought he'd be perfect to voice *The Fan and the Flower*. "I took a couple of drinks to build up my fortitude and said to Paul, 'You don't know me. I'm Bill Plympton and I'm working

on an animated film.' But Paul said, 'Wow! I love your stuff!'" Turns out that Giamatti was a one-time animator who had wanted to open his own studio and was happy to participate.

Although his new short didn't make the cut, Plympton praises the poignant story created by writer/producer Dan O'Shannon (*Frasier*, *Cheers* and the 1997 Oscar-nominated animated short *Redux Red Riding Hood*). "When I visited my family over the Christmas holidays, they talked about how they cried over the Fan killing himself to protect the Flower. I thought 'Boy, this has

SHORTS

rated by Jake Gyllenhaal, the 10-minute film re-enacts a tightrope artist's walk between the towers of the World Trade Center in 1974. Heartbreaking lines like, "He could feel the towers breathing..." make this a particularly affecting film. And Sporn knows the Oscar dance, having been nominated for *Doctor DeSoto* ten years ago.

Happily, stop-motion animation is also represented, notably by *Ichthys* from Poland's Marek Skrobecki and the enigmatic Australian film *The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello*. Director Anthony Lucas of 3D Films brought 20 years of stop-motion expertise to this Jules Verne-styled adventure. Amazing machines move through skies where islands float among the clouds. In addition to Verne and H.G. Wells, Lucas cites inspiration from Edgar Allen Poe. "His insight into the psyche's darker side is original and often poetic. I try to capture the mood of his stories in my images."

Lucas' sepia-toned, shadow puppet style is intriguing, and he reveals, "We used all sorts of junk and plenty of balsa wood in the sets. But we mixed it up a lot and sometimes used CG objects. I like to put as much texture as possible into an image, and with junk or objects it's all there in front of you. I like 'em dirty! Integrating all the disparate elements was a hassle, but the results made it all worthwhile." The 26-minute film will be the first part of a trilogy, Lucas

hopes, "kind of like a miniseries."

The buzz about *Jasper Morello* certainly increased after it won at Annecy, the festival where Pixar chose to premiere its own Oscar contender, *One Man Band*. (Pixar chose to show its film out of competition, notes producer Osnat Shurer, "Because even though it's a very personal film, we do have studio resources at our disposal.")

Pixar's seven-minute short is a first effort for co-writer/directors Andy Jimenez and Mark Andrews, who worked together on *The Iron Giant* and *The Incredibles*. *One Man Band* chronicles a rivalry between two street performers in a piazza, each hoping to earn the single coin possessed by a little girl. Told through music and pantomime, it's a little edgier than Pixar's theatrical fare. But in short films, observes Jimenez, "You can explore different ideas that you wouldn't normally be able to in a feature. Mark and I had to use completely different parts of our brains to come up with a short film idea."

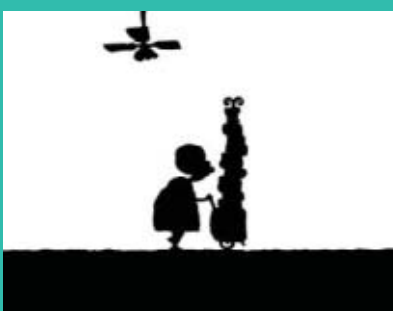
They were challenged to do this by Pixar president and tech guru Ed Catmull, but as Andrews notes, "This short wasn't an exploration in new technologies. The biggest thing was that we had first-timers in several supervising roles. We did have technical challenges, but our supervisor, Bill Polson, found time-saving ways to build the sets and rig the characters. They built the whole set out of four buildings and three roofs."

And the filmmakers did benefit a tiny bit from Pixar's 'digital backlot,' laughs Andrews. "The bird that takes off in the film is the island surveillance bird from *The Incredibles*."

Another strong contender is Scottish animator Sharon Colman's hand-drawn short, *Badgered*, which served as her graduation project from the National School of Film and Television in London. This witty old-school favorite centers on a weary badger who is trying hard to get a good night's sleep. An avid naturalist, Colman says she made the short as a response to a nuclear base which has threatened the landscape in her hometown of Balloch.

Another shoo-in this year was the ultimate student CG film, Shane Acker's *g*. Created through UCLA's Animation Workshop, *g* won Best In Show at SIGGRAPH and earned Acker the top Student Academy Award. If it also wins the Animated Short Oscar that might be a record.

Either way, this haunting, post-apocalyptic tale so impressed director Tim Burton that he helped Acker get a Focus Features deal to direct the theatrical version. Acker seems a bit astonished by it all. "My initial ambition was to make a short film that was a showpiece; to make a splash and get people thinking that I could make a feature. Now I'm trying to pinch myself hard enough to wake up. It's been a crazy ride." ■



There's Always Next Year: The buzz was strong for shorts such as (clockwise from left) *The Madagascar Penguins* in *A Christmas Caper*, *Moongirl*, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, *The Fan and the Flower* and *The Mantis Parable*, but they didn't make the final cut.



SHORTS



Encore! Encore!

It's no surprise that Pixar's latest animated short, *One Man Band*, earned an Oscar nomination this year.

by Chris Tome

Two street performers with the very appropriate names of Treble and Bass compete for the affections and generosity of a young girl (called Tippy) in *One Man Band*, Pixar's charming new animated short directed by Mark Andrews and Andrew Jimenez. Seen as the direct descendent of John Lasseter's revolutionary 1986 short *Luxo Jr.*, this beautifully executed project has been getting raves since it premiered at the Annecy Festival in France last spring.

It took Andrews, a story supervisor on *The Incredibles* and *Jimenez*, an animatics pioneer, about three months to come up with the story and boards and nine months to complete the project. "As much as I enjoy working on the features [*Monsters, Inc.*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*], this is a real treat. It's a pure artistic endeavor without the need to feel like there's a dollar sign hanging over your head. That's nice!"

Unlike other shorts that concentrate on script and storyboard first, then move on animation and musical elements, *One Man Band*'s origins were strongly rooted in its music. After all, its main stars were Italian-style street musicians! According to Jimenez, it was a lot of music that drew the directors to spin this specific tale.

What's clear is that *One Man Band* is well on its way to join the company's other memorable shorts from the past decade or so. Lasseter won an Oscar for *Tin Toy* in 1988, Jan Pinkava took the prize for *Geri's Game* in 1998 and Ralph Eggleston's *For the Birds* was the winner in 2001. *Luxo Jr.* was nominated for an Oscar in 1987 as was Pete Doctor's *Mike's New Car* in 2003 and Bud Luckey's *Boundin'* in 2004.

What may not be as well known, how-

helped convince Jobs and Walt Disney Studios to take a chance on *Toy Story* on the strength of his brilliant early shorts, including *Luxo Jr.*, one of the first CG-animated shorts which also introduced the world to the smooth-operating lamp in the company's logo.

Pixar's shorts department is not a profit-generating machine: Its sole reason is to further the capabilities of the artists and technicians, as well as to advance the technologies in use. For example, *Geri's Game* was responsible for bringing to light the technology of subdivision surface modeling. Using Level of Detail polygon smoothing, it was a vast leap forward for modeling, in general, and it allowed artists to create smooth, rounded surfaces much more easily, without the need to

use NURBS modelers.

Although *One Man Band* doesn't break any new ground technically, it showcases a fantastic CG-animated world, full of bright colors, cartoony character designs and smooth human movements. It also helped train new hires at Pixar on proprietary software such as the studio's

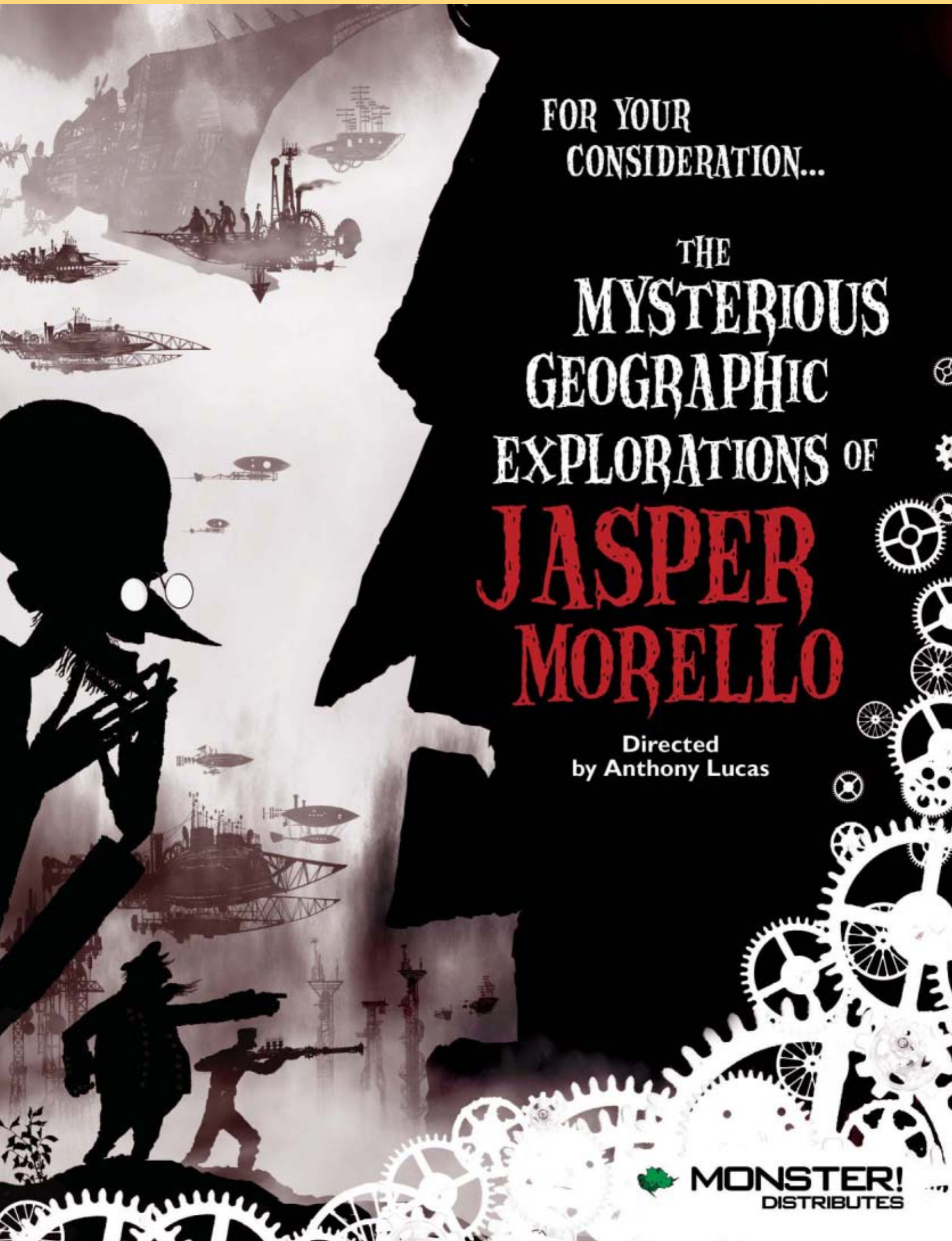
character animation tool, *Marionette*.

Andrew and Jimenez's short will screen in theaters in Los Angeles and New York to promote it in the very competitive Oscar race. However, mass audiences will be able to acquaint themselves with Bass, Treble and Tippy and their Italian piazza this May when the short plays with Lasseter's much-anticipated feature release *Cars* in theaters all over the world. ■

To find out more, visit www.pixar.com/shorts/omb



ever, is how these short films have helped push innovation and technology at the studio from the very beginning, all the way back to 1986 when it was founded by Steve Jobs, Lasseter, Ed Catmull and Loren Carpenter. Not only are some new hires trained in the Pixar ways by starting in the shorts division, but many amazing technological innovations have come out of this group, not the least of which is subdivision surfaces and innovative texture mapping tools. It is told that Lasseter



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Crouching Cat, Flying Mouse

With 66 years of show biz experience, Tom and Jerry are back to tickle our funny bones in a clever martial arts-inspired adventure co-directed by Joseph Barbera.

by Ramin Zahed

In Hollywood, few stars of physical comedies can stay popular and agile for over six decades. Luckily, different rules apply to cartoon characters. Take, for example, William Hanna and Joseph Barbera's Tom and Jerry. This dynamic cat-and-mouse duo has been a popular fixture of cinemas and TV screens ever since it was first introduced (as Jasper and Jinx) in the 1940 MGM short *Puss Gets the Boot*. Recently, toon fans were thrilled to learn that the 94-year-old Barbera joined forces with Spike Brandt and Tony Cervone of *Duck Dodgers* fame to create Tom and Jerry's 162nd theatrical short. The result is a wonderful seven-minute outing titled *The KarateGuard* which was considered a strong contender in this year's Oscar race.

In the piece, Jerry decides to learn some martial arts techniques from a guru known as The Ancient Wise One in order to defend himself against Tom's mischief. Once the guru realizes that Jerry might need more help, he offers him a magical gong which summons a canine Samurai bodyguard. Classic cartoon fun ensues as the cat-mouse-dog trio dives into a martial arts madness that would make Bruce Lee proud.

"When we created these characters, we had no idea how popular and beloved Tom and Jerry would become," reminisces Barbera. "It was such a thrill to direct this short. With all the creativity coming from animators in the field today, it is great to see that animation is more popular than ever."

"It's truly an honor to have Joe here at our studio contributing his invaluable experience, wisdom and creativity," says Sander Schwartz, president of Warner Bros. Animation. "The concept and story are very unique to this property, because the bulk of the Tom and Jerry cartoons were made before martial arts became so well-known in the U.S. We were lucky to have Joe engaged to tell this story and work on it with brilliant show runners like Spike Brandt and Tony Cervone. They'd been talking about this



Legendary: From left, Spike Brandt, Sander Schwartz, Tony Cervone and toon titan Joseph Barbera go over the details of the wonderful new Tom and Jerry short, *The KarateGuard*.



short for a very long time, and when we got the support from Cartoon Network, it was one of those exciting moments when the creative gelling of an idea is realized."

"We both came from Chicago, so we hadn't really worked with any of the great old directors like the people in the business out here have had the opportunity to do," says Brandt. "It was really nice to actually have face time with Mr. Barbera." Cervone adds, "*The KarateGuard* exists because of people's admiration for Mr. Barbera and a passion for

the characters."

So how did Barbera come up with the storyline? Cervone guesses that Barbera might have been inspired by some of the anime shows on TV. "I believe he first got the idea by observing kids that were learning karate and thought maybe we could do something with it!"

Brandt and Cervone wanted the short to fit as a middle period Tom and Jerry cartoon. "Everything we've been doing is to make this feel like it's just another one coming from that classic period," notes Cervone. "That being said, it's also a modern cartoon. It has a vibrancy and colorfulness that looks very modern in comparison to the classic cartoon shorts. The backgrounds were hand-painted, but the characters were colored on computers, not on cels like in the old days. There's a lit bit more of fluidity to some of the camerawork that the computer lets you do."

Brandt says one of the particular pleasures of the project was watching Barbera act out both characters. "I'm always in awe around him, and wondered who he was more like, personality-wise," he says. "Was he more Tom or Jerry? Then he would act them out and you could see that he's both. You could see the egotistical attitude of Tom when he's teasing Jerry ... as well as the cuteness of Jerry. His cute little attitude and smile, it was equally him!"

When it comes to comic inventiveness, though, the duo's anecdote about Jerry mooning Tom takes the prize. "In the cartoon, Jerry is taunting Tom and is making faces at him," recalls Brandt, "and either Spike or I said, 'Can we end that with Jerry mooning Tom?' and Mr. Barbera was like, 'What? Can we moon him? No you can't do that! Tom and Jerry is a classy production.' That was on Friday."

Cervone continues, "Monday morning he said, 'If you can do it tastefully, then we can do that.' He was thinking about it all weekend. We got such a kick out of that!"

"Mr. Barbera said, 'Make sure you put boxer shorts on him.' Then we had a meeting to decide what would be on the boxer shorts!" adds Brandt with a smile. "If we added anything to this cartoon, it was the highbrow elements." ■

For more info visit www.cartoonnetwork.com/tv_shows/tomjerry

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Something to Bark About

A beautifully restored version of the Disney classic *Lady and the Tramp* wags its tale in a new 50th anniversary DVD edition. **by Sarah Gurman**

In the opening sequence of *Lady and the Tramp*, Darling unwraps a hatbox on Christmas morning to find the demure golden cocker spaniel Lady waiting as her gift. According to Mouse House lore, this scene was drawn from Walt's own experience, having once offered his wife a puppy in a hatbox after forgetting a dinner date. This and other wonderful tidbits are included in a new 50th anniversary DVD edition of the 1955 classic directed by Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske and Clyde Geronimi.

Disney's team of restoration experts approached the special edition project with the originators' artistic intent as their guiding principle. Dave Bossert (*The Lion King*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*), artistic supervisor on the restorations of *Bambi*, *Cinderella* and *Lady and the Tramp* explains, "When you're doing a restoration like this, it's like going into the Sistine Chapel and cleaning a fresco: You want to take the layers of dirt off that have built up over the centuries, you don't want to change the fresco."

Disney's restoration crew was first assembled in 2004 to work on the special platinum edition of *Bambi* with managers

Steve Poehlein and Theo Gluck. After 14 months and over 10,000 man-hours, the team revived the beloved deer prince and streamlined its process. They tackled *Cinderella* next, putting in about seven months, and then, turned to the doggy

them back to Los Angeles where they were cleaned and inspected. "Because those early negatives are on successive exposure film, they're actually black and white negatives that have three color records for each frame of film," Bossert says. "The black and white negative actually works in our favor because there's a slower breakdown than if it were a color negative."

The negatives were scanned into a computer at 4k per frame, and a high-res digital copy was archived. With the help of Burbank-based vendor Lowry Digital, who developed proprietary tools specifically for these Disney restoration projects, the red, green and blue color records were digitally recombined, and then the frames went through a stabilization pass and a dust-busting process.

"It's a night and day change when you actually see what the film looked like," Bossert says. "The color's are more saturated, and the images are more crisp. One of the interesting things about the successive exposure film is that you've got three separate color records that have to be aligned and when that's done on film at the Technicolor lab, it's a mechanical process so it's never a hundred percent dead



duo, whose restoration took approximately as long as *Cinderella's*.

Like many of the Disney classics, the negatives from *Lady and the Tramp* were on nitrate film stock which decays over time. When the team set out to restore the film, their first step was to retrieve the negatives, which were on loan and being stored in optimum conditions at the Library of Congress Film Facility in Ohio, and bring

on, but when you do it digitally it is as perfect as you're going to get it and that means that the lines, the inclines on the characters are crisp the way they were intended to be seen."

In addition to the increased clarity on the visuals, the restored version of the film lets you see the bigger picture, literally. *Lady and the Tramp* originally took form on a course similar to *Bambi* and *Cinderella*, but during production Walt decided to switch tracks and complete the film as CinemaScope feature. "Since it started life as a traditional film and went to CinemaScope, when they created the printing elements for the theaters, at the time the spec was to put a magnetic strip down the side for the audio track," Poehlein notes. "When this film got released in theaters, it was a CinemaScope negative, but actually one side of the image was cropped to provide room for the audio soundtrack. So originally the aspect ratio was 2:5:5, but no one until this DVD will actually have seen the full 2:5:5 frame."

Also, DVD viewers will have the option of listening to the film's original mono track

or the Disney-enhanced audio courtesy of sound master Terry Porter.

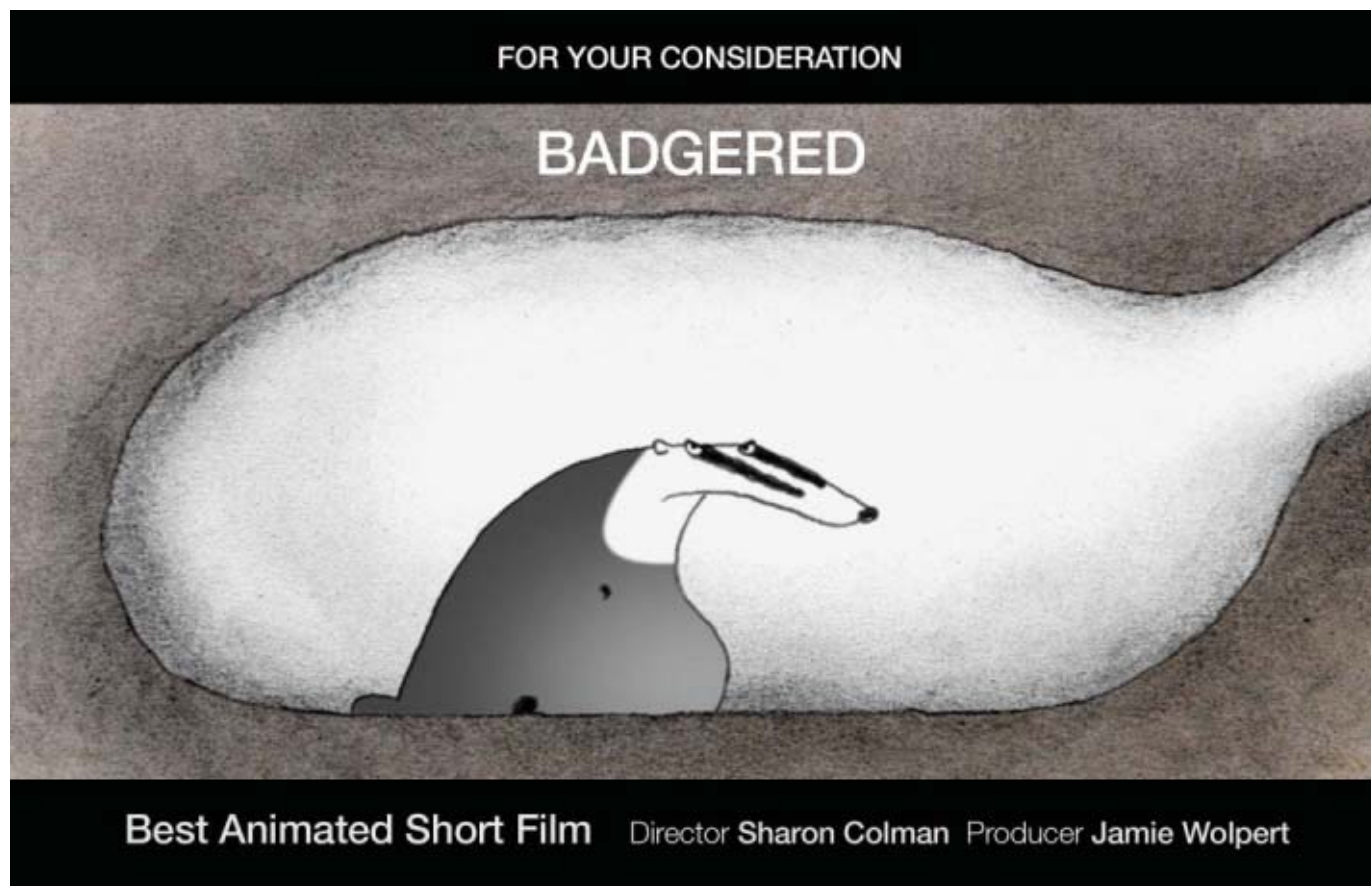
After 50 years, aficionados still consider *Lady and the Tramp* one of the great love stories of our time and a true classic of the Disney Golden Age. "To me it's one of the best animated films of the Walt Disney library," Poehlein says. "Some of Tramp's animation, especially, is amazing. He has this great scene where he opens up and wakes up and takes a shower under the railroad pump and you feel the warmth of that character because of how well it's animated. To me, that really sets it apart, the ability for them to capture the essence of those dogs and give them great personality."

With three gems under its belt, the diligent Disney restoration dream team looks forward to diving into other classics from the Mouse's library. "I think at the end of the day you feel good when you show the



finished film to Ollie Johnston, which we did with *Lady and the Tramp*, *Bambi* and *Cinderella*, and you know he just had this big smile on his face," Bossert recalls. "I went up to him and I said 'Ollie, what did you think?' and he said, 'It was the way it was supposed to look, it's beautiful, it's beautiful.' I mean he was overwhelmed. When you hear it coming from somebody like Ollie or hear Roy Disney gushing about how fantastic it looked, that's all you need to hear." ■

Walt Disney Video releases the 50th Anniversary Edition *Lady and the Tramp* (\$29.99) DVD on Feb. 28.



The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of this month's hot new anime titles on DVD



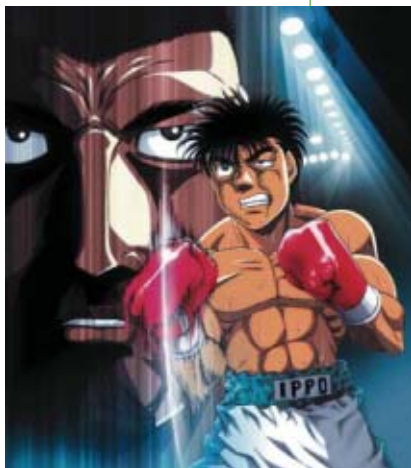
Illustration by Dan Hofstede

by Charles Solomon

Fighting Spirit, Vols. 1-9 (Geneon: \$29.98 each)

Ippo Makunouchi, the hero of this upbeat *Rocky* story, is a good-natured kid who works hard, helping his widowed mother with the family fishing charter business. But the local bullies regularly pound the sushi out of him. Ippo lacks the resolve to defend himself—until he has a chance encounter with Mamoru Takamura, a rising boxing star. Under the guidance

of Takamura and gruff gym owner Genji Kamogawa, Ippo throws himself into boxing with a mixture of I'll-give-it-my-best dedication and new-found



love. As he develops his abilities as a fighter, he begins to dream about the Japanese featherweight title. The story often rambles: The series ran for 76 episodes in Japan. From the minute he steps into the ring, it's a foregone conclusion that Ippo will win the championship, but that's inherent in the genre: Did anyone ever doubt Rocky Balboa was going to come out on top? The animation is very limited and the clean up is terrible: the proportions of Ippo's face change noticeably from scene to scene. But the filmmakers make the irrepressible Ippo so likable, even audience members who dismiss boxing as organized brutality may find themselves rooting for this underdog.

Hikaru no Go: The Go Master's Descent, Vol. 1 (VIZ: \$24.98)

Hikaru no Go offers many of the elements that made *Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* so popular: a good-natured hero with unsuspected potential, supernatural influences, challenging rivals and a complex game. But it's free of the product tie-ins that often turn other series into prolonged commercials. Writer Yumi Hotta and artist Takeshi

Obata scored a big hit with the manga of *Hikaru no Go* (available in paperback here), and the animated version preserves its appeal. Hikaru Shindo is an ordinary sixth grader until he encounters the ghost of Sai of Fujiwara, an elegant court Go master who lived 1,000 years ago. When he was falsely accused of cheating, Sai drowned himself, but his love of Go binds him to this world. Sai starts to play Go through Hikaru and stuns everyone

when he enables the novice to defeat Akira Toya, an icy prodigy whose father is also a Go champion. But after a few games as Sai's puppet, Hikaru wants to play on his own because the game is interesting, and the focused intensity of the better players intrigues him. He finds the sense of purpose he previously lacked as he makes his tentative entry into the world of junior tournaments and school Go clubs; his teacher and his friend Akari don't know what to make of this transformation. As his playing improves, Hikaru

acquires a second rival: Tetsuo Kaga, whose in-your-face arrogance contrasts with Akira's aloof demeanor. Viewers don't need to play Go to enjoy Hikaru's adventures, but the series may introduce Americans to the challenging game.

Viewtiful Joe, Vol. 1 (Geneon: \$19.98)

Based on the popular Capcom video-game, *Viewtiful Joe* plays like *Fast Times at Osaka High*.

The slacker-dude title character resembles the offspring of a diminutive anime heroine and a ne'er-do-well from the American underground comic scene. He's short, with spiky hair, a backwards baseball cap, cargo shorts, a small goatee and multiple earrings. Joe worships the anime hero Captain Blue, a fixation his girlfriend, Silvia, patiently endures. But when they watch a "classic" feature, a new passel of villains, the Jadov, defeat Captain Blue and drag Silvia into the film. Joe dives into the screen, where the Captain presents him with a V-watch, a magical device that enables him to transform into a superhero version of himself. Joe hasn't had much practice at this superhero stuff, and his learning curve isn't the steepest in the class: Silvia is going to need rescuing for a long time. The word "dude" accounts for about half of Joe's English dialogue; the original Japanese isn't included on the soundtrack. *Viewtiful Joe* is very silly, but the silliness is good-natured and never mean-spirited. ■



V-Day Hot List

A little DVD gift in honor of St. Valentine can go a long way! by Sarah Gurman

**Wallace and Gromit:
The Curse of the Were-Rabbit
(DreamWorks, \$29.99,
Wide-screen)**

For those of you who never made it to the theaters last summer, it's time to bite the bullet and pick up this DVD because Nick Park, Steve Box and the rest of the

Aardman infantry have proven that Wallace and Gromit have enough brilliant schemes and inventions to fill shorts, features and beyond. In their latest plasticine adventure, the duo are employed as the veg-guarding Anti Pesto team, humane sentries of their town's gardens in the days leading up to the annual giant vegetable-growing contest. Superb voice work from Peter Sallis, Ralph Fiennes and Helena Bonham Carter coupled with marvelous hand-crafted animation and homages to *King Kong*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and other classic films already scored *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* a host of nominations and awards. The extras include Box's 1997 short *Stage Fright*, a behind-the-scenes look at Aardman's Bristol studio and all kinds of clay-related games, puzzles and printables. Did we mention the movie has a romantic subplot as well? That means you can also rack up some points with your date on the 14th!

**Stuart Little 3: Call of the Wild
(Sony Pictures, \$24.94)**

Director Audu Paden (a veteran of animated TV shows such as *Spider-Man*, *Ani-maniacs* and *Pinky and the Brain*) runs the ship on this third direct-to-DVD installment in the *Stuart Little* cycle, which tracks the

summer break adventures of E.B. White's gutsy mouse. Featuring CG work by Mainframe, Canada, *Call of the Wild* situates Stuart at a beautiful lakeside cabin vacationing with the fam, passing the time hiking and canoeing in true scout style. His revelries in nature are interrupted when the beast, a nasty tyrant of the forest, takes the family kitty, Snowbell, prisoner. With the help of his new skunk friend, Reeko, Stuart foils the beast's plans and frees all of the animals from his control. The original film's cast—Michael J. Fox, Geena Davis and Hugh Laurie are joined by Tom Kenny and Wayne Brady in this tale of the mouse-boy's summer in the great outdoors. The DVD release includes the "Reeko's Funk" video, interactive games and a "Learn to Draw!" feature.

**Teen Titans:
The Complete First Season ;
The Batman:
The Complete First Season
(Warner Home Video,
\$19.98 each)**

Do mere half-hour doses of Warner Bros.



Animation's young superheroes leave you thirsting for more? Thankfully the complete first seasons of *Teen Titans* and *The Batman* are coming to

DVD (say ta ta to those half-season collections!) and the 13 episodes of each show on these sets will supply you with plenty of evil avenging action to chew on: Glen Murakami's much-copied *Teen Titans* offers a new generation of angst-ridden superheroes fighting for justice while reckoning with the trials of adolescence. With crisp visuals of Robin fending off the influ-

ence of Slade with the help of his loyal crew, and a theme song courtesy of Japanese rockers Hi-Hi Puffy Ami Yumi to boot, you'll easily plow through the first season in one sitting.

As for *The Batman*, following in the footsteps of *Batman: The Animated Series* is a tall order for any toon. While the Dark Knight's 2004 manifestation lacks the Deco/noirish intensity of *Batman: The Animated Series*, watching a younger Bruce Wayne dive into the escapades of Gotham's underbelly is entertaining, and the show features some interesting reinterpretations of classic villains. You can't beat the voice cast either, which includes Tom (SpongeBob) Kenny as The Penguin, Gina Gershon as The Catwoman, Clancy Brown as Mr. Freeze, Adam (Batman) West as Mayor Grange and Dan (Homer) Castellaneta as Scarface!

IGPX, Vol. 1 (Bandai, \$29.98)

The anime wave is definitely here to stay in the U.S., and the dazzling uncut episodes of *IGPX, Vol. 1* make it clear that the trend is something to smile about. When Cartoon Network partnered with Japanese toon house Production I.G and Bandai Entertainment to produce this first original series for its Toonami block, it also marked the first time a U.S. cable network teamed up with a Japanese animation studio to produce a new property. Set in 2048, the 2D/CG trailblazing show centers on the high velocity robot battling of IG PX (Immortal Grand Prix), which has become the most popular sport in the world. Team Satomi has just won the minor league and now it's time to find out if they can hang in the majors. If you've got some loose change lying around, you should consider investing in the Special Edition set for \$39.98 that comes with a limited edition T-shirt featuring the Satomi team logo! ■





Animal Studies

Julie and Tim Cahill's *My Gym Partner's a Monkey* is yet another charming new series from the hit factory known as Cartoon Network. **by Ramin Zahed**

Forget the Chinese zodiac...2006 is quickly shaping to be the year of the monkey. Following in the footsteps of Peter Jackson's *King Kong* and Universal's new animated *Curious George* movie, Cartoon Network will be getting its own new simian star with the hilarious new series *My Gym Partner's a Monkey*. Created by talented husband and wife team of Julie McNally Cahill and Tim Cahill, the series centers on a young boy who finds himself attending a school created for zoo animals, as a result of an administrative snafu. (Our hero's name is Adam Lyon...and because of a typo, he is enrolled as Adam Lion!) Life at the Charles Darwin Middle School is certainly a challenge for Adam, until he befriends Jake Spider Monkey and learns to

avoid the bull shark known as Virgil "Bull" Sharkowski.

The Cahills, who met when they worked at Los Angeles-based toy company Applause back in the early '90s, got the germ of their show idea from their friend, animator Tony Cervone (*The Karateguard*, *Duck Dodgers*) who went to an alternative school "without walls." Apparently, there was a monkey at this cool school, and little Tony used to hang out with this simian pal. One thing led to another, and Julie and Tim found themselves pitching their series to Cartoon

Network's Sam Register. "We came to pitch something else," recalls Tim. "But after we finished, Sam said, 'Well, do you have anything else?' and we were like, 'Well, we got this other idea, but we haven't really locked it down yet.' And he went, 'That's the one we should do!'"

The new Cartoon Network show isn't the first time the husband and wife team have collaborated on toons. They wrote and produced the 1995 short, *Carrotblanca*,

which was a clever spoof of *Casablanca* starring Bugs Bunny and the Looney Tunes gang. They also wrote three seasons of *Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries* and *Histeria!*, and the direct-to-video features *Tweety's High Flying Adventure* and *Tom and Jerry: The Magic Ring*. Their other credits include episodes of *Baby Looney Tunes*, *Tutenstein*, *Mucha Lucha!* and *Krypt to the Superdog*.

Obviously, with so many cool projects behind them, the Cahills know what makes a show stand





out in the cluttered field of kids' entertainment. "The whole experience makes us happy," says Julie. "The story ideas, the writing and boarding process, it's our baby, and we are seeing it grow." Tim adds, "One thing that's great about it is that the humor doesn't speak down to the kids at all. I think kids are going to like the wackiness of it and the school-zoo environment. There's a cool fish tube, for example, that Jake [the titular monkey and our hero's best friend] and Adam use as a water slide. Plus, we try hard not to preach to the audience. Sometimes, much to our surprise, some sort of lesson emerges in the end. But we believe that kids should be able to turn off their brains sometimes. Their lives are so scheduled and jam-packed with activities and challenges, they need to just tune everything off and have fun."

As an example, the creators point to an episode in which Adam is sick and tired of eating leaves and dirt like the rest of his animal student friends, so he demands to get some human food at school. As a result, all the other animals get hooked on pizza and hamburgers too and their indulgences lead to their gaining a lot of weight! "There was a lesson there, but we aimed to have entertainment and silliness first," adds Tim.

Another big plus for the show is that it fits very well with the rest of Cartoon Net-



work's powerful arsenal of zany shows aimed at the six- to 11-year-old viewer. "It has that pretty traditional, graphic Cartoon Network look, along the lines of *Dexter's Lab* and *Powerpuff Girls*," says Tim. "Our art director Dan Krall (*Samurai Jack*) came up with a wonderful design for the school," adds Julie, "It's a place which was used by humans at one point, but it's now completely animal-friendly with a built-in jungle gym in place. It's really like another character in the show."

The first 13 episodes of the traditionally animated show have been finished and the Cartoon Network team has already started work on the second season. Although the writing, storyboards and design aspects of the show are handled at the Burbank studio, the service work is handled by South Korea's Saerom Animation. The Cahills say they are definitely expanding the world of Adam (voiced by Nika Futterman) and Jake Spider Monkey (the omnipresent Tom "SpongeBob SquarePants" Kenny) in the second season. "We are having more fun with the characters," says Tim. "It's funny how we bring in a brand new character to help with a story point we need to make. Then, we end up liking the character so much that it develops a life of its own and shows up in subsequent episodes."

Of course, we have to ask Tim and Julie how it feels to be the Brad Pitt and Angelina

Jolie of the cartoon world! "Julie is very forgiving," says Tim. "The secret is not to take anything too seriously. Sometimes I'd say the stupidest, wackiest thing and Julie will just laugh. You just got to have a sense of humor about things!"

"It would be weird not to work together at this point," Julie chimes in. "We've tried not to talk about work at home, but we end up doing it anyway. I think we need some 12-step program."

Julie also holds the amazing distinction of being the first woman creator of a Cartoon Network show. "Animation is a very male-dominated industry. But I believe things have improved for women, compared to when I first started in the business. I think it's a much healthier climate for animation in general."

And what kind of helpful advice do they have for toon world newbies? "You just have to persist and hang in there," says

Tim. "You just keep plugging away, until you get your own show. Then, don't ever think of sleeping again and learn to drink lots of caffeinated products. Seriously, though, always try to have fun with what you're doing. Whatever you put into it, you're going to see it on the screen." ■



My Gym Partner's a Monkey premieres Monday, Feb. 20, and will air regularly Fridays at 9 p.m., beginning Feb. 24 on Cartoon Network.

Revenge of the Feature Creatures

Monster Warriors, the new Jetix Europe live-action TV series, takes a page from the beloved Ray Harryhausen movies. **by Dominic Schreiber**



TELEVISION

The basic premise behind Jetix Europe's new live-action hybrid series *Monster Warriors*, in which four teenagers save their city from a different giant monster each week, might sound more than a little bit like another long-running series on the Disney-owned network. But with its mix of high-end CG creatures and futuristic cityscapes, the show is a far cry from the rubber-suited villains and spandex-clad super heroes of *The Power Rangers*.

In fact *Monster Warriors*, which is produced by Canadian production company Coneybeare Stories, owes more to the world of 1950s B movies and the groundbreaking work of movie master Ray Harryhausen. Not only is the stop-motion pioneer a role model for the villain of the 26-part series (a retired movie director called Klaus Von Steinhauer), but Harryhausen's influence can also be seen in the various CG monsters that are unleashed on the inhabitants of Capital City each week.

"If you take a film like *Jurassic Park*, the key is selling the notion that these creatures are real," explains series creator Wilson Coneybeare. "Our conceit was a little different because it was based entirely on the idea that a movie-maker from the '50s, who had made a lot of those big bug movies, had somehow managed to make his models come to life."

Coneybeare first came up with the concept when he was

stuck on the subway between stations and began imagining what would happen if a giant T Rex suddenly attacked the train. But it wasn't until he got to talking to Sean Evans, creative director at Toronto-based post-production and effects house Bullseye, that the idea started to take shape.

In particular, Coneybeare was keen to know if feature-film effects could be brought to the small screen for a weekly series: "We realized about a year into just talking about the project that we were really heading into feature-film territory and applying it not just to television, but children's television, which is an area where there are not huge budgets, but there generally is a tremendous amount of creativity."

By that point the two companies were working together on the Discovery Kids series *Time Blazers*, and in between shooting they began to develop the storyline and work on some tests. "We had a four-foot spider in the Bullseye parking lot, filmed handheld on DV," recalls Coneybeare. "With

that under my arm I really started to build up the show creatively and was able to go around to people."

Armed with the tests, a bible and a couple of scripts, Coneybeare was eventually able to bring on board a Canadian

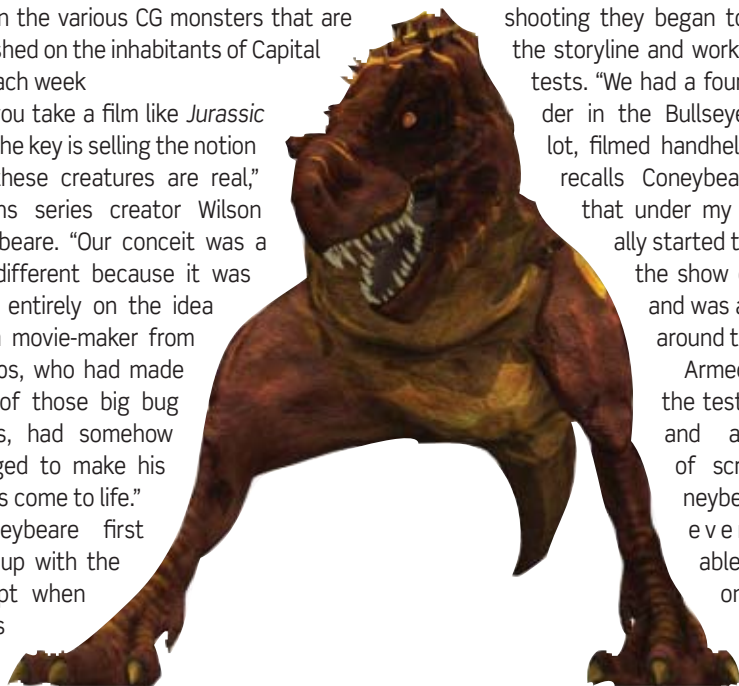
network YTV, which was soon followed by Jetix Europe.

"It just coincided perfectly with our desire to increase the amount of original live action on the channel and to go after a slightly older demographic," explains Michael Lekes, senior VP of programming at Jetix Europe. "What we wanted to do was find live-action concepts that are consistent with our brand profile, with adventure and fantasy, but in a slightly more mature and sophisticated context."

While the cast members are all real, though, the true stars of the show may very well be the monsters. "It's not good enough to have a giant bumblebee, you've got to have a *Monster Warriors* giant bumblebee," stresses Lekes. "There has to be a stylistic approach to the creatures that is ownable. To be honest it was one of the most difficult things for a long time."

Since the monsters are actually giant 1950s stop-motion creatures brought to life, the team at Bullseye didn't want to borrow too literally from nature. "They would still have to be models, so they would have a slightly different movement," notes Coneybeare. "That gave us a different challenge."

For animation director Derek Grimes, that was one of the big attractions of the project. "When I was a kid, me and my friends would watch these crazy movies about giant praying mantises attacking New York" he explains. "That's really what got me interested in special effects and animation in the first place."



Marathon's Team Galaxy Beams Down to Cartoon Network

Paris-based toon powerhouse **Marathon Animation** will be moving from the femme espionage world of *Totally Spies!* to the teen space cadet universe of *Team Galaxy* this fall. Cartoon Network has sealed the deal to air 52 half-hour episodes of the new high-energy series.

"*Team Galaxy* combines excitement, adventure, and comedy—all the elements children look for in a great animated series—and brings them to the forefront," says Marathon president Vincent Chalvon-Demersay.

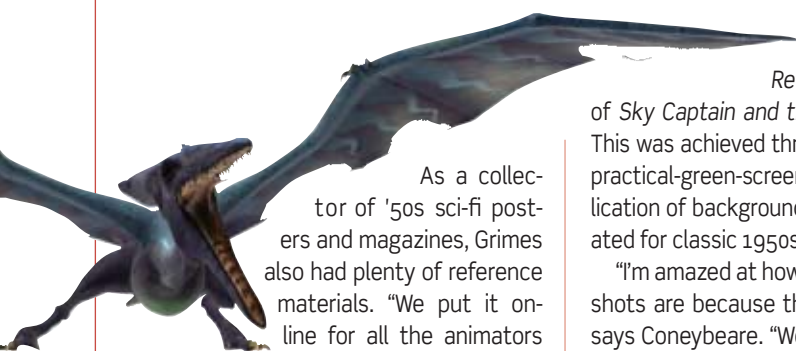
The show mixes traditional and CG animation to draw young viewers (6-11) to the world of three unlikely heroes who have to juggle the challenges of being regular

teens in school as well as battling aliens in space to save the world. "We are honored to work with Cartoon Network on this new show and we are confident that *Team Galaxy* has all 'the right stuff' to be a smash success both on- and off-screen," offers David Michel, general manager of Marathon Animation. "The series follows the same formula that made *Totally Spies!* so special: a blending of action and outrageous character-based comedy which allows us to get the boys and the girls to watch!"

Michel points out that space-themed shows are often more successful in getting the attention of boys. However, he adds, Marathon's goal is to get the right blend of comedy, grounded characters and action. "We can have the adrenaline-prone boy viewers

and make the show fun so that girls will want to watch it as well."

More announcements about the show's licensing and toys plans will be made at the New York Toy Fair next month. Marathon's *Totally Spies!* series is seen in more than 100 countries and territories, including Cartoon Network in the U.S. For more information, visit www.marathon.fr. ■



As a collector of '50s sci-fi posters and magazines, Grimes also had plenty of reference materials. "We put it online for all the animators so they could get a taste of where we were going," he says. "But we don't lean too heavily in that direction. It's just sort of this veneer over the top of our modern world."

Another challenge for the team was the fact that each episode features a different monster. "We have sort of a playtime with every monster before we actually get into the show," explains Evans. "The animators need that because the creatures are so different. In that way it's quite a bit different to the usual production. But once we're in the groove with it, a show will go through in about two weeks."

The other big CG element is Capital City itself, which has a cinematic look influenced by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Tim Burton's *Go-*

tham City in *Batman Returns* and the New York of *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*. This was achieved through a combination of practical-green-screen shooting and the replication of backgrounds similar to those created for classic 1950s and 1960s films.

"I'm amazed at how good the matte plate shots are because that's a huge element," says Coneybear. "We really wanted to use matte shots and plate shots as they did in the '50s. We wanted to digitally recreate that tradition."

In all, each half-hour episode has up to 50 creature shots, along with around a minute's worth of matte paintings of the city. To pull this off, Bullseye set up a new studio with around 30 animators, many of whom had worked on major feature films like *Hellboy* and *Spider-Man*.

Not surprisingly, that level of CG and compositing has stretched the budget to the max, but Coneybear is confident the results will raise the bar in kids' live action. "Obviously there's budgetary constraints," he admits. "But we are determined to keep the production quality up. We are determined to keep the look at a level which is

hopefully feature-film quality."

With the show launching on Jetix Europe this spring, audiences will soon be able to judge for themselves, while buyers will get their first glimpse at this April's Mip TV market in France. Bejuba's Tatiana Kober is the show's co-exec producer and holds distribution rights in the U.S., Latin America and Asian Pacific regions. Buena Vista holds all other territories, while Coneybear handles Canada. ■

Dominic Schreiber is a London-based journalist who specializes in animation and television. He is the managing editor of *Television Business International*.



Derek Grimes



Michael Lekes



Wilson Coneybear

The Padded Cel

The Sequel Rights Amendment: The Right to Beat Dead Horses!



by Robby London

Home audiences can look forward to Disney Home Video's sequels to *The Emperor's New Groove* and *Bambi* ... and even a movie about *Tinkerbell*. (According to rumor, plans to animate *Tinkerbell* using motion capture of Richard Simmons were scrapped due to boycott threats from the religious right—as well as the aesthetic left.)

Of course, this only serves to remind us that sequels are nothing new. Say that again. One could argue that the huge proliferation of sequels and spin-offs in all media in recent years is nothing more than the acknowledgement that audiences (especially kids) are comfortable with the familiar. And possibly even more germane, consider the people who greenlight these projects. Development executives have learned to don the flak jacket of past success to help absorb the bullets of blame that will strike them sooner or later—when a sequel tanks.

Oh...and don't forget the budget savings of re-used designs which make bean-counters so giddy they actually bake the beans! (Not to be confused with cooking the books.)

Arguably sequels are part of the same mindset that results in every shopping mall across America being virtually interchangeable, having all the same stores and chains. We won't try to explain this seemingly insatiable craving for homogeneity, but clearly it's a force to be reckoned with in our culture.

So, let's put aside the fact that many of the most successful animated features in recent years (e.g. all the Pixar



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

movies except *Toy Story II*) have been ORIGINALS. In the spirit of "if you can't beat 'em then let 'em beat you into submission," we thought we'd throw out a couple of our ideas for animated sequels to well-known titles.

Noah's Ark: S.U.V.: In 2008, after hurricanes and tsunamis overwhelm the world, the survival of all animals is threatened! Once again...it's Noah to the rescue. Fortunately, Noah's new ride has that nifty option which allows him to reconfigure the seats to accommodate all nine species of animals not already extinct. But...wait! Gas is \$2,738,678.99 a gallon! There's only one way Noah can make this

kind of coin in a hurry. He runs for Congress!

Little Red: Riding in the Hood: In this sequel which takes place a few years after the original, Red has grown up to become a sweet, naive prostitute who rises up from the street to confront her misogynist rapping pimp, Wolf B Bigg N Badd. Special cameo by Yoda (in drag) as the martial arts, butt-kicking grandmother.

Chicken Little 2: The Globe is Warming! Don't think this one won't happen! Special guest appearance by "W" as Tex the Ostrich. And, heck, screenwriters might as well get started on ...

Chicken Little 3: Flu the Coop. A strange enchantment which birds get from drinking Evian threatens the world, but...no one will listen! Will Chicken be able to break out of quarantine to save the day? Featuring a return appearance by Tex the Ostrich and introducing his bumbling sidekick "Brownie."

Vietnam 2: Quagmire in Iraq. You're right. Probably no one under 45 will recognize this sequel. Plus...thus far not even Oscar-winning screenwriters have been able to crack the ending. (Our favorite suggestion: declare victory and leave.)

The Big Bang 2. This is a natural because it plays to everyone's secret fantasy of starting over. And this time, we don't have to bother with insignificant and arbitrary trivialities like ... say ... science. We can "intelligently design" everything to be just the way we want it. Now the entire UNIVERSE can look like the same shopping mall! Hallelujah! ■

Robby London is a seasoned animation industry veteran who is currently working on Pinocchio 2: Got Wood?

PRIX ARS ELECTRONICA 2006

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2006 Anicommm Awards

Our favorite animated commercials of the year are fast, funny and visually spectacular!

We were glad to screen all the glorious spots sent to our office for this annual competition, and although it's often a tough job to pick the winners, after much deliberation, we narrowed the field down to four top contenders. Our goal was to select the ones

that struck that elusive balance between aesthetic appeal, technique, presentation and smart usage of animation. The fact that they all put a smile on our faces was just icing on the blurbs! Congrats to all the brilliant, creative teams involved!

TELEVISION

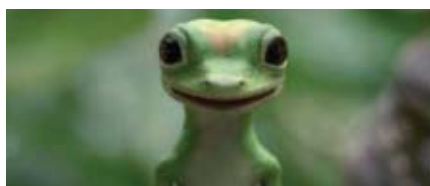


Second Place: Tooheys Extra Dry "War of the Appliances" Production Company: Animal Logic

Director: Graeme Burfoot; **exec producer:** Jacqui Newman; **animation director:** Simon O'Leary; **design supervisor:** Sarah Beard; **vfx supervisor:** Will Reichert; **agency:** BMF Advertising

Kudos: The last can of Tooheys Extra Dry beer causes a mini-riot between an aggressive trio of domestic appliances in this elec-

trifying commercial from Down Under. Reminiscent of that famous "Rockit" music video from the '80s in which inanimate objects moved around realistically, this project charts the glorious fight between a washing machine, a vacuum cleaner and a cunning pool cleaner, all shot in an apartment in Sydney, Australia and brought to realistic CG life (on Maya and Flame). It made us Yanks wish we had 12-packs of Tooheys stockpiled in our kitchens as well!



Third Place: Best Buy "Soar" Production Company: Curious Pictures

Director: Saul & Elliot; **animation:** Yowza Animation, Roger and Claude Chiasson

Kudos: This clever ad for Best Buy had us fooled in theaters with its on-the-spot tribute to classic 2D animated features of the past two decades. What seems, at first, to be a trailer for an upcoming movie about the coming of age of a young eagle in training turns out to be a spot for the electronics store (and its cell-phones). Hey, now that John Lasseter and company are heading the toon division at Disney, maybe we can see more traditional pics like this one in the pipeline! Please?



Green Badge of Honor: Of course, no Anicommm Award would be complete without a special mention of our favorite CG-animated lizard, the ubiquitous Gecko of the popular Geico insurance TV commercials. This year, the team at Framestore NY (led by David Hulin) made the green one even more flexible and realistic than his previous incarnations! Somebody, please give Gecko a three-picture deal. ■

First Place: Coca-Cola South America Futbol: Rivalries Production Company: LAIKA

Director: Mark Gustafson; **exec producer:** Paul Golden; **art director:** Curt Enderle; **sculptor:** Scott Foster; **effects animation:** Patrick Van Pelt; **agency:** Santos

Kudos: Hats off to the talented team at Phil Knight's studio in Portland, Oregon, for delivering some of the best stop-motion spots of 2005 in their first year of operation. In this particular high-energy, brightly colored outing, award-winning director Mark Gustafson offers 15 characters interacting in seven different vignettes as they are all swept away by soccer fever. We loved the way the fly and the fly squatter, the cactus and the balloon, the chicken and the cleaver-packing cook, the lab technician and his lab rat, the tree and the woodsman, the hippie and the soap bar (and several others) get to bond as the winning team scores a goal. LAIKA's similarly bouncy spot for ESPN also landed on our top 10 favorites.

Fantastic Fourth: Move On PAC "Save the Republic" Production Company: Flickerlab

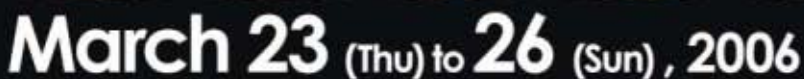
Director: Harold Moss; **producer:** Sally Ann Syberg; **art director:** Zartosht Soltani; **animators:** David Michael Friend, Eric Merola, Chad Redmon;

fx animator: Robert Jan DeVries

Kudos: We knew the folks at New York animation house Flickerlab were capa-

ble of awesome spots, but this stunning spot for Move On floored all of us at the office. Killer animation, great analogy (comparing corrupt right-wing politicians with evil Senator Palpatine's forces in *Star Wars*), and (we think) a timely political message made this one a must-see for everyone.





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<http://www.taf.metro.tokyo.jp>

Suginami Ward: Animation Festival 2004 in Suginami on March 11 (Sat) and 12 (Sun)
Nerima Ward: Anime Festival Pre-event on March 12 (Sun)
Musashino City: D'Arny Anime Festival 2004 on March 18 (Sat) and 19 (Sun)
Mitaka City: Mitaka no Mori Anime Fes! 2004 on February 25 (Sat) and 26 (Sun)

The Name of the Game

E-toys and gadgets continue to rule the market at New York's 2006 American International Toy Fair. **by Ramin Zahed**

If you're in the toy or kids entertainment business, you will find yourself inexplicably drawn to New York city, Feb. 12 thru 15th, as the Toy Industry Assoc.'s 2006 American International Toy Fair takes over the Jacob K. Javitz Center. More than 1,500 manufacturers, distributors, importers and sales agents from 30 countries are expected to attend this popular event to promote and look for the next big plaything in this temperamental market.

Of course, toy and toon players have already learned from the hits and misses of the past holiday season and are ready to start promoting the hot items of summer and winter of 2006. In case you missed the reports, all you need to know is that consumer electronics continues to be huge. Among last quarter's hits: Disney/Fisher-Price's Tumble Time Tigger, the ubiquitous Scene-It DVD games, Megatech's MegaChopper II RC Helicopter, Wow Wee's Roboraptors, Hasbro's Darth Vader Voice-Changer Helmets, Leap-Frog's Fly Pentop Computers and Fridge Phonics MagLetter Set, Dora The Explorer's tables and chairs, and everyone's favorite emoto-tronic pals, Tiger Electronic's Furby Dolls. And lest we forget, there were a lot of kids running around with Playmates Toys' King Kong Electronic Fists!

Living La Vida Jetson

With 2006 shaping up as one of the busiest periods for animated and CG-heavy tent-

pole features in recent memory, it's going to be interesting to see how the tie-in toy market adapts to so many titles in one calendar year. We're also witnessing a time where electronic toy developers are finally able to deliver what consumers have been expecting modern technology to give us. In short, we are a bit closer to living like George and Jane Jetson.

"We are finally reaching a point where we can see great applications of technology in our toy lines," says John Friend, senior VP of Cartoon Network Enterprises, a division of the company which will have a presence at Toy Fair for the first time. "Two years ago, a lot of what we saw was electronics for the sake of being electronic, but now we have items that really add to play patterns and expand kids' experiences in the characters' worlds."

Friend also adds that we're witnessing a huge migration towards customization. "We live in a world where we can create special menus for our characters," he adds. Among Cartoon Network's new offerings at the market are new toys from the cablers' home-grown toons *Kids Next Door* and *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi*, as well as announcing partners for the recently



launched series *Ben 10*. "One of the biggest surprises of last quarter was the tremendous success of our *Ed, Edd 'n' Eddy* items. The property's Midway video game has performed very well and was one of the top-three TV-based licensed video-games in November and December." (We're sure show creator Danny Antonucci will be happy to hear that!)

Of course, everyone's ready for the ripples Warner Bros.' summer release *Superman Returns* will be making in the toy world. "We've assembled a powerhouse of partners to ensure that Superman's return is as impactful as the character himself!" notes Kelly Gilmore, senior VP of Global Toys and Themed Entertainment at Warner Bros. Products. "Mattel, our master toy partner, has developed a complete toy program that includes action figures, accessories, outdoor toys, flying toys, role-play items and even dolls. Kid Station will offer a broad range of electronic products including TVs, DVD players, MP3 players, CD boom boxes, phones and two-way communication devices!"

Roar of the Roboraptor

Gilmore is also seeing a huge growth in the electronic toys market. "The myriad of iPod interactive products and robotic items such as the Roboraptor continued their growth," she adds. "This continued charge results in both an expanded presence of technology/electronics in the toy aisle, but also lower prices as the technology improves. In turn, we are seeing equally strong sales of high-priced items, as well as lower-priced electronics that are

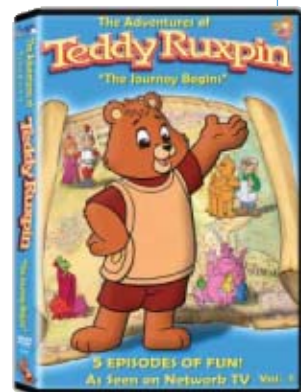
continued on page 40



Fun figures for Cartoon Network's *Kids Next Door*.



Mattel's cool action figure for Warner Bros.' *Superman Returns*.



Talk of the Town

A sampler of what the big toon-related movers and shakers are offering at this year's Toy Fair in New York.

4Kids Entertainment

Playmates Toys will roll out a toy line in conjunction with the new **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Fast Forward** TV show. You can also get a sneak peek at the new Imagi **Turtles** CG feature film set for release in 2007. For **Winx Club**, Mattel is unveiling an interactive product called the Bloom of Winx Club Magic Makeover Styling Head, which "magically" comes to life when girls use the special makeup applicator. Play Along is launching **Cabbage Patch Kids Newborns**, which are the smallest 'Kids yet. Mattel is expanding the **Yu-Gi-Oh! GX** toy line with more exciting action figures and toys. And, inspired by Toe's pirate adventure series, Mattel's **One Piece** action figures and role-play items bring the popular characters to life.

Alliance Atlantis

The focus will be to secure additional licensing partners for **Lunar Jim**, **Dragon Booster** and the **CSI** fran-

chise. **Dragon Booster** also landed a sweet deal with McDonald's Happy Meal recently.

Blue Box Toys

Previewing products from its new b2 division, including the innovative **Mi Jam** line up which consists of four devices that are designed specifically to be used in conjunction with digital music devices.

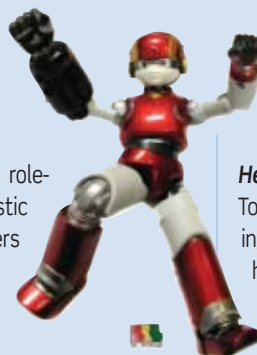
BRB Internacional

The Spanish toon house is planning to release well-designed and expertly sculpted **Iron Kid** action figures.

Bandai

The toy company known for bringing some of the coolest Japanese toy trends to the U.S. will be unveiling action figures, talking figures, cy-

cles, all-terrain vehicles role-play items such as Mystic Morphers and Titan Sabers and Cycle Blasters in conjunction with the **Power Rangers Mystic Force** series. Also available: new 1.5" miniatures, collectible 3.5", deluxe 5-6" feature figures and accessories, role-play items and vehicles tied to the fifth season of Warner Bros.' **Teen Titans** series.



Breakthrough Entertainment

Atomic Betty has numerous tie-in ventures in the mix. Among them: Fisher Price Pixters, Brighter Child's educational software, Hallmark's party goods and gift accessories, Dan River's bedroom ensemble and Betesh Group's room décor: Not bad for a evil-fighting girl from a small Canadian town!

Cookie Jar

The company is introducing a toy line for **The Doodlebops** with master toy licensee Mattel. **The Doodlebops**—kids' favorite rock 'n roll band airing on Playhouse Disney in the U.S.—are rock band icons that easily translate into innovative musical instrument and role play toys that allow young children to stage



their own musical productions. We have our fingers crossed for more Gerald McBoing Boing goodies.

DreamWorks

Wild Planet Toys is the master licensee for the studio's next big CG feature, **Over The Hedge**, which opens in theaters in May. Sababa Toys is master games licensee, B-Equal is taking charge on DVD games, Jakks Pacific will handle plug-n-play games and Activision will act as master interactive licensee. We're sure they've lined up some cool toys for the holiday release **Flushed Away** as well!



DIC

Andy Heyward's much-in-demand company is back at Toy Fair with an all-new doll line for **Strawberry Shortcake** from Playmates Toys. Also on top: a new venture for Strawberry Shortcake baby which will include a line of products for infants as well as tie-ins with well-known and trusted brands for diapers and baby products. The **Classic Trolls** line, familiar to baby-boomers, will roll out in January 2006 with master toy partner Jakks Pacific's Play Along division producing

and marketing the new line of spikey-haired figurines, as well as pencil toppers and key chains.

Disney

The Mouse's consumer arm is offering a slew of pleasures from its newest

Disney Fairies franchise, which highlights the magical world of Tinker Bell. **The Little Mermaid Reflections** line will be unveiled just in time for the Platinum edition DVD release, and of course, keep an eye out for fun products celebrating the 80th anniversary of **Winnie the Pooh**.



continued on page 41

LICENSING

Name Game

continued from page 38

now competing with the traditional sub \$10 toy segment."

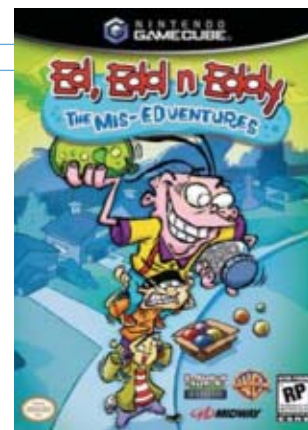
4Kids Entertainment's chairman and CEO Alfred Kahn agrees with Gilmore about the growing influence of technology in the toy biz. "These new electronic toys will continue to bring together the wonders of the new digital world with the magic and delight of children's play world, although I believe there will always be a demand for traditional toys."

Among the new 4Kids tie-in toys to be unveiled at Toy Fair are Playmates Toys' new line associated with the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Fast Forward* TV series, as well as the 2007 feature release from Imagi. Mattel is also offering a new interactive toy called the Bloom of Winx Club Magic Make-over Styling Head. "It 'magically' comes to life when girls use the special make-up applicator. When you move the applicator to her eyes, they close. And when you use the applicator on her lips, they pucker. When the makeover is finished, Bloom will comment on her new look!"

Keeping the girls at Winx Club company at the Toy Fair is Atomic Betty, who is getting her own educational software as well as party goods, gift accessories and room décor. Joy Tashjian, who handles the animated property's licensing plans for Breakthrough's Atomic Betty property, sees a lot of longevity for music and electronics-related toys. "Kids are moving from action figures at a much younger age to electronics like iPods, karaoke players and MP3 players. We've seen items like Kidz Bop Star Station become a fast sell-out at all retailers and only available on eBay at a premium."

Shopping and Spying a la Marathon

Young girls also seem to have a never-ending appetite for Marathon Entertainment's quartet of young Beverly Hills jetsetters known as *Totally Spies!* As Patricia de Wilde, Marathon's director of licensing explains, Marathon will be launching two new tech-related items in conjunction with the popular series, Gameloft's first downloadable phone game for children and Atari's new GBA game slated for the holidays. "The first full-fledged apparel line of *Totally Spies* branded tops and bottoms will also be launched at U.S. retailers this spring," De Wilde adds. "A new line



Nifty Winx Club tie-ins.

of comic-book albums are also in the works from U.S. publisher Papercutz, which also orchestrated the recent relaunch of the new Nancy Drew collections."

De Wilde believes that *Totally Spies* will be able to corner the market in certain categories because there are not many girl properties which have action and tech-related possibilities. "There's an increasing demand for technology-driven toys and games, but as it is with CG animation, it's now expected and not really a selling point any more. It must really offer an additional gaming value. We are looking forward to the *Totally Spies* DVD game board in the near future."

The folks at Cookie Jar, home of *Arthur*, *Gerald McBoing Boing* and the live-action hit *The Doodlebops*, will also have a strong presence at the event. "Our goal for the Doodlebops topline is to get kids up and off the couch," says Lisa Tanzer, the company's VP of U.S. marketing. "Music is becoming the lifestyle for both kids and adults, which is why *The Doodlebops* has been such a fast success. It's not just what you listen to, but how you listen to it!"

Peter Keefe, president and CEO of Earthworks wasn't as impressed with the hits of the past holiday season. "It was a non-event," she says. "There was a dearth of truly compelling boys' action-adventure toy properties. Too many people in the toy industry tried to

play it safe with yet another retro re-introduction or spurious spin-off and ended up with mediocre results. Fortune favors the bold, not the boring!"

In case you need some entertainment during Toy Fair, you might keep

an eye out for a familiar fuzzy character from the '80s. Ryan Kugler, president of First National Pictures, promises that Teddy Ruxpin will be making the rounds on the crowded show floor. Kugler has secured the rights for the 65-episode series, *The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin*, and will release the first two volumes on February 21. He believes that eight out of ten people are familiar with the character, which was one of the popular toys and TV series of the late 1980s. "The show has sold millions of units on VHS, so when I tell people about the DVDs, 75 percent of the conversation is done. We'll also be releasing the *Baby Felix* DVDs in May. Other technologies are being introduced, but DVD is not going away. People are always going to buy and watch DVDs!" ■

For more info, visit www.toy-tia.org.

The Roboraptor



Talk of the Town

continued from page 39

Entara Ltd.

Commonwealth Toy is unveiling a range of adorable **Jakers!** plush and detailed plastic toys, giving kids the opportunity to live out their own adventures off screen with their favorite **Jakers!** characters—Piggley Winks, Ferny, Dannan and Wiley The Sheep.

Fisher-Price

On the 10th anniversary of **Tickle Me Elmo**, the furry red phenomenon returns like no toy ever before as T.M.X. Fisher Price will also be offering tie-ins for popular Nickelodeon shows including **Fairy Wishes Dora**, **Sing & Spin Pablo** and **Air Launch Aang** and **Appa** for **Avatar** fans.

HIT Entertainment

HIT has new direct-to-video specials coming out across its core brands. This fall, **Bob the Builder** goes west and trades in his hard hat for a cowboy hat in the all-new full-length musical special, **Bob the Builder: Built to be Wild**. Also in fall 2006, HIT



will release a new full-length special for **Barney** shot on-location and a new full-length special for **Angelina Ballerina** titled *All Dancers on Deck*. Licensees will introduce integrated product programs around these direct-to-video specials.

Marathon Entertainment

The French cartoon house introduces a new line of **Totally Spies!** video games for Nintendo GBA and DS platforms from Atari. Also pleased to introduce a new **Totally Spies!** interactive educational PC Game from Brighter Child.



Mattel

The company is bringing the Let's Dance Barbie inspired by Barbie as Princess Genevieve, the star of the **Barbie in the 12 Dancing Princesses** movie. Also new at the confab: the ultimate teen drama queens My Scene dolls which have a moveable face feature. Kids

should get ready to race and blast a flying pterodactyl out of the sky while avoiding erupting volcanoes in the new Hot Wheels Terrordactyl Track Set. Meanwhile, the **Superman Returns** Inflato-Suit will be available just in time for the release of Warner Bros.' summer tent-pole movie. Also, keep an eye on the programmable **Cars'** Fast Talkin' Lightning McQueen Vehicle inspired by the much-anticipated summer movie from Disney/Pixar. The fast-paced UNO Spin will also be released in honor of the 35th anniversary of America's number one card game.



preschool learning toys, novelty toys and role-play toys as well as other plush products, set to roll out with the new television product line in the fall of 2007.

SBG/b Equal

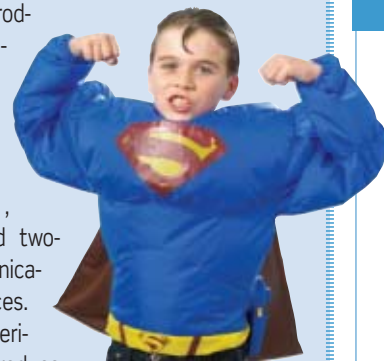
SBG/b Equal comes to Toy Fair 2006 with a stellar lineup of new board and TV DVD games based on the hottest entertainment properties including **CSI**, **NASCAR**, **World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)** and Discovery Channel, in addition to new DVD Games based on the company's partnership with DreamWorks.

Sony Pictures

The buzz is going to be all about the CG-animated penguins of the studio's upcoming **Surf's Up** movie. The merchandising program will take a tropical approach to character licensing, riding the waves of the surf culture through edgy graphics and stylized line art.

Warner Bros.

Master toy partner Mattel has developed a complete toy program for this summer's **Superman Returns** that includes action figures, accessories, outdoor toys, flying toys, role-play items, even dolls. The Kid Station will offer a broad range of electronic products including TVs, DVD players, MP3 players, CD players, phones and two-way communication devices.



Bandai America will introduce its exciting new **Firehouse Tales** toy line, launching this spring. The line will include several sizes of vehicles, playsets, construction, bath toys and more that are true to the spirit of the property. WBCP is exploring new toy partners for **Baby Looney Tunes**. Master toy partner for **Xiaolin Showdown**, Toy Play, will introduce a new line of toys based on Warner Bros. Animation's hit series.

—Compiled by Sarah Gurman

McFarlane Toys

We love the company's 13-inch resin Puss in Boots figure (*Shrek 2*) which features a real plume, removable rapier and custom base (\$60). The bright minds over at McFarlane also recently announced a global partnership with Warner Bros. Consumer Products to produce a new line of action figures based on characters from the Hanna-Barbera library with an initial concentration on stars like Fred Flintstone, Tom and Jerry and Quickdraw McGraw.



Playmates Toys

New lines will be unveiled in conjunction with **The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**, **Disney Princess** and **Amazing Pets**. New product lines include **Strawberry Shortcake**, **Disney Fairies**, and the classic animated franchises, **The Land Before Time** and **Little Robots**. The new TMNT product line gives the turtles a new look, new weapons, new villains, new friends, new communication devices and much more. Playmates will unveil a character-driven product line based on **Little Robots** in the fall 2006. *The Land Before Time* Playmates toy line-up will include the release of four plush characters packaged with two 45-minute DVDs, as well as figures and playsets,





More Fangs for the Money

Underworld: Evolution's James McQuaide prefers working on vfx sequences that best serve the narrative instead of delivering irrelevant eye candy.

by Ron Magid

The star-crossed vampire and werewolf lovers of 2003's surprise hit movie, *Underworld*, and their warring clans—think Romeo and Juliet with fur and fangs—are back. And the stakes (and wolf bane) have never been higher.

When your movie's titled *Underworld: Evolution*, the pressure's certainly on for the visual effects team. Audiences are already expecting not only bigger, but better, more evolved FX than they saw in the original, and thanks to executive producer and vfx supervisor James McQuaide (*Underworld*, *The Cave*) they're certainly going to get 'em.

"On all counts, this is one of those rare sequels that delivers head-and-shoulders above the original," he promises. While *Underworld* featured a meager 230 fx shots, of which only one was 3D, the sequel boasts 553 mostly advanced digital shots. "That's a very sig-

nificant number, even in the age of *Star Wars* prequels with 2000-plus shots, especially since our budget was not what you might expect," McQuaide states. "We had to be very creative about how we did things so we tapped into every genre of visual effects from miniatures to full 3D transformations to straight CG comps using practical elements and full 3D including a great deal of character animation. There were only a handful of houses on *Underworld*, but to make the money work and get the quality and scope *Evolution* demanded, we brought in Luma Pictures, nTropic, Furious FX, Fantasy II Film Effects, Cafe FX, Framestore-CFC, Krypton, Company 3 and even set-up a small vfx company in my office—Sub/Par Pix—that ended-up delivering 122 shots (more than any other house except Luma)."

"There's no ILM, Rhythm & Hues, or WETA," explains McQuaide. "These are all small companies

a result, while there are nearly three times the number of vfx shots in this picture compared to the first, most are impossible to identify."

McQuaide didn't set out to be a visual effects supervisor: He began his career as a development executive for Joel Silver and screenwriter before taking a job as P.A. on Lakeshore Entertainment's *'Til There Was You*. "I ended up becoming the associate producer," McQuaide explains, "and here I am 25 movies later, still working with these guys. It used to be that only action/sci-fi/fantasy pictures had vfx shots. However, over the last couple years, as vfx work has become less cost prohibitive and more photo-real, I worked on pictures like *The Human Stain* or *Wicker Park*—films you wouldn't imagine having visual effects: In actuality, they had 100 shots sheet! As the industry started using these subtle visual effects, I was doing them so I learned the craft and now visual effects are the norm."

McQuaide's unique background actually enabled *Evolution's* evolution: "With the very last shot of the first *Underworld*, I suggested to Len [Wiseman] that we should probably do something to strongly hint at a sequel, so we animated Marcus's eyes turning black. A similar idea jumped out in *Evolution* when Selene [Kate Beckinsale] meets the dying Corvinus, [whose centuries-old scheme gave rise to the vampire-werewolf war], and she needs to be empowered to fight the real bad guys, but she's not strong enough to do so. Corvinus says, 'Drink my blood and you'll become the future,' which is narratively important but a rather abstract idea. So to drive this idea home visually, we created a concept that suggests that she's really become

Going Batty: Director Len Wiseman gives latex-clad vampire Kate Beckinsale a few tips on how to snag a werewolf on the set of *Underworld: Evolution*.



but, hey, I'll put the shots we pulled off up against anything else out there right now. Len's (director Wiseman) directive was always to make certain that no matter what, the CG had to be real, and in essence, invisible. Everyone understood this, and as

something greater: Her eyes transform from blue to something akin those of a cat being hit by a headlight, which Furious FX called 'the regal look.' It's not the most glamorous vfx shot in the picture, but it's one of the most important since it's supporting what the picture is all about, namely Selene's evolution. From my perspective, serving the story is what vfx should really be all about.

Of course there's plenty of digital coolness to go around, when it comes to creating the undead Marcus's taloned bat-wings and the marauding lycanthropes. While the wings were designed by returning creature creator Patrick Tatopoulos, they were built and animated exclusively in CG as were the more sprightly werewolves. "Luma did 65 wing/talon shots, which really the best I've ever seen. In particular, the shots where Marcus tries unsuccessfully to open his injured wings are spectacular because they look like great animatronics," McQuaide says. "Luma also did about a dozen transformation shots and another dozen CG werewolves. The performers in suits do a wonderful job in close-up and medium shots, better than you could probably do in CG today—certainly cheaper—but there are great limitations to their movements, particularly when speed is required. Once they start to move, you got to rely on CG to get you across the room and bank on your animators nailing the movements."

McQuaide's value as a producer was underscored when creating last minute composites of miniature helicopters, built and shot by Fantasy II, approaching Luma's CG island fortress. "We initially considered building a miniature fortress but it became clear it would be a bit more expensive than CG and not allow for the same flexibility to change shots as the evolving picture/cut might require," McQuaide explains. "We got a very late start on constructing the CG fortress because of budgetary issues—given the scope required, *Evolution's* a very aggressively budgeted movie."

While the budgetary issues were being ironed out, McQuaide began what would become an eight-week miniature shoot with Fantasy II. Of all the miniature shots (there are close to 80 in the movie), the one that sticks out as McQuaide's favorite is one that will likely go mostly unnoticed. "The DP on the miniature shoot, Chris Warren, set up a cable-cam rig of sorts that allowed him to be pulled above the massive tank we were using for the shoot," the producer notes. "He would start across and then the miniature chopper would play catch-up, flying just beneath the soles of his shoes. The shot that resulted was so real that a film-maker with a



great deal of experience in aerial photography who stopped by the set couldn't believe that we'd been able to get an insurance company to allow us to shoot from one helicopter flying just above another. He was even more surprised when we told him it was an all-miniature shot."

Once McQuaide found the money in the budget, Luma did a tremendous job of playing catch-up, quickly building a remarkably photo-real island fortress. Meanwhile, the miniature helicopter shots were being filmed by Fantasy II over their 100' water tank. "We put the DP on a tiny swing being pulled across on a cable stretching the long way across the

"We had to be very creative about how we did things so we tapped into every genre of visual effects, from miniatures to full 3D transformations to straight CG comps using practical elements and full 3D with character animation."

— *Underworld: Evolution's* exec producer and vfx supervisor James McQuaide

square, shooting down on the remote control helicopter as the water's being chopped up by a guy with a steel drum," McQuaide marvels. "They showed James Cameron the footage and he went crazy: You can't shoot from one helicopter to another on top of each other over water—it's incredibly dangerous—and he thought it was real. You'll never know that it's anything but a real helicopter."

Another part of this miniature shoot was the pho-

tographing of green screen plates of Selene's helicopter that were to be comped into the initial approach and circling of the CG fortress/island. However, while the budgetary issues had been addressed and work had begun on the construction of the fortress/island, it had begun late so McQuaide had no choice but to go ahead with the shooting of these miniature plates even though the animation they would ultimately be comped into hadn't even been block approved. The results were mixed.

Unfortunately, Fantasy II filmed the helicopter before the actual shots for the approach to the digital island fortress were finalized. "The miniature helicopter plates were shot with a certain lenses and lighting directions that were just different enough from that of the CG background to make the comps read as false," McQuaide sighs. Once again he put on his producer hat and found the solution. "We cyber-scanned the miniature chopper and quickly re-built it in CG, which made the comps

work but revealed another problem: the fortress felt too small. Virtually all the fortress shots were traveling too fast: the only way the chopper could circle the island so quickly was if it was 1/4 the size we'd imagined it to be. This realization occurred days before delivery, so there was only time to re-animate a couple of shots; the rest were run through the Kronos plug-in in Furnace. Luma added crows circling the fortress towers and increased the spec on the water surrounding the island to provide a visual reference for scale. While there is still room for improvement—and hopefully the DVD will allow for this—the final shots in the picture now feel truly epic. If I hadn't controlled everything post-production wise in terms of the budget and everything, I don't think the visual effects [dollars would have stretched enough.] Having the power to juggle if needed was really quite great."

Who knew a mere mortal with a talent for juggling could save armies of vampires and werewolves? "Films are increasingly being made in post-production to a large degree," McQuaide concludes. "We're no longer

making 'walk and talk' movies where anybody can finish the picture. Right now, it may be unique for a single person to have both an executive producer and vfx supervisor credit on a feature film, but given the way the process is changing and changing fast, I can't imagine it being very unique in the near future. It's a very exciting time to be making movies." ■

Sony's *Underworld: Evolution* is currently playing in U.S. theaters.



State of the Art

All You Need Is Lava

A look back at how ILM concocted the awe-inspiring lava for *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*. by Barbara Robertson

This month's question comes from Stephan Trojansky: "ILM did really beautiful work with the lava for *Star Wars: Episode III*. I'd be interested in hearing about the blend of digital and practical elements."

The lava erupts during *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*'s climactic battle between Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) and Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) on the volcanic planet Mustafar. As the two Jedi warriors fight on metal girders, rivers of fiery lava splash and flow around them. A lava waterfall glows behind them. To create this hellish environment, Industrial Light & Magic composited together miniatures, CG fire, practical (filmed) elements and matte paintings.

"The core element that anchored the look was the miniature," says Willi Geiger, digital sequence supervisor. "Brian Germand and his team made a beautiful one to 132-scale model of the whole lava river valley on Mustafar." The modelers built the river bottom out of plexiglass so they could shine light from underneath. For lava, they mixed colored water and methacryl (methacrylcellulose), a white powder used to thicken ice cream among other things. To make the lava look crusty, the crew sprinkled it with tiny bits of burnt cork.

"They poured the gloopy methacryl stuff

into the top of the model, sprinkled the burnt cork on as they poured, and if they got it just right with the lighting underneath, it looked like a flowing river of lava," says Geiger. "So that was the starting point for pretty much every shot."

Each shot took around ten motion control passes, in part because cork blocked the light. "We'd generally run a pass with different versions of the crust to get stronger lights on the rocks, and then we'd trickle different colors of UV paint down the model to get lava running down the rocks."

As soon as the shots were completed, the crew dismantled the model to make room for a second miniature section needed at the end of the sequence to film Anakin burning on the rocks.

Thus, because the crew knew that director George Lucas might want to reframe the action in the lava environment after adding the greenscreen shots of Anakin and Obi-Wan when the miniature wouldn't be available, they built a CG version of the set. To make it exact, they scanned the miniature to create the CG model, then, texture mapped the CG model with photographs of the miniature.

"When we needed to add camera moves or things that hadn't been shot, sometimes we'd use the CG version of the set," Geiger says. "But, sometimes we could do it by

corner pinning and warping the plate [the filmed shot]." For one shot in which Lucas wanted a reverse angle, they flipped the plate, ran it backwards, and added a 3D camera move.

Both miniature sets were dressed with burning CG. "A lot of

what you see only existed in CG," says Geiger. "We populated the shots with gloops and spurts to add detail and give the environment scale, but we mainly used the CG for stuff we couldn't get from the model."

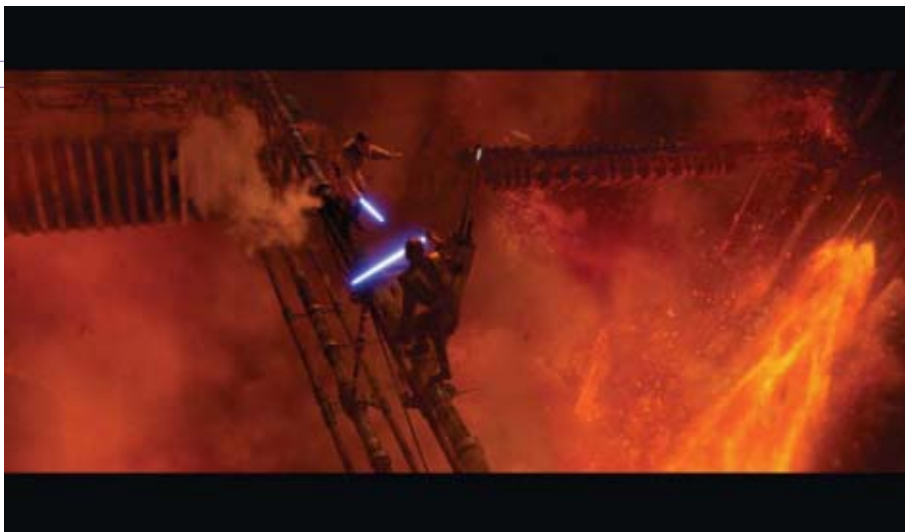
To add the CG elements, the crew worked with a virtual camera that was match-moved from film of the actors and the miniature and geometric versions of anything with which the CG lava needed to interact. When the camera got too close the lava river simple surface shaders created the necessary detail. But, the gloops, spurts and splashes required particle simulation.

"I think we had CG lava in about 100 shots," recalls Geiger. "Nearly every shot had some CG. But the CG lava is a hero element in maybe 20 shots—the huge eruptions and the close interaction where the big metal girder falls into the lava, floats down the lava river, and goes over the lava fall."

Rather than create lava by using ILM's fluid simulation engine, the crew decided to work with particles in Autodesk Media and Entertainment's Maya for flexibility and faster turn-around, extending that software with proprietary tools.

"You can break down the proprietary tools into two main classes," Geiger says. "Plug-ins that simulate inter-particle forces to get fluid flow and tools that would let us sculpt the lava."

Simulating inter-particle forces made the otherwise disconnected particles stick together and form strands. To control the particles, digital artist Masi Oka wrote a system that limited the region of influence for fields operating on the particles. As Geiger explains: "We wanted to have the particles form into a fluid stream without giving away what we were really up to. With the framework Masi Oka wrote, certain fields would only have a region of influence within a narrow tube shape. So, by using a combi-



Looking for Some Hot Stuff: George Lucas had a clear picture of how he wanted the lava to behave at all times. Rather than create the lava by using ILM's simulation engine, the crew worked with particles in Autodesk Maya and Entertainment's Maya for flexibility and faster turn-around.

nation of fields and shapes that controlled precisely where each field had an influence, we could essentially sculpt the fluid. You can do a little bit of that in Maya, but it's very limited out of the box."

"This was George's [Lucas] fantasy," he adds. "He wanted to direct precisely what the lava does at times, which is one reason why we didn't go for full, physically accurate simulation. You lose control when you go down that road."

To render the particles, the crew used a combination of mental images' mental ray and Pixar's RenderMan. The tricky part of lava is that it reflects light, but it's also incandescent—it glows. That glow had to be reflected onto other objects and onto itself to make the lava look hot. Mental ray handled the global illumination, ray tracing the complex geometry. That data was fed into RenderMan for final beauty renders with motion blur.

"We pulled everything apart into multiple passes to get more flexibility in the compos-

ite," Geiger notes. "Even with all the tricks to make the lava as fast to simulate and render as we could, it was generally the most time-consuming part of the pipeline, so anything we could do to keep flexibility was a good thing." Often, they'd render the lava in one pass with basic lighting, and then render the self-illumination of the lava in another. The illumination of the surrounding set by the lava would also be a separate pass as would smoke, sparks, and raining debris, which were a mixture of filmed and CG elements. "I think it would be safe to say there were around 20 CG elements in a typical shot," he says. To create the far background, the section of a 360-degree cyclorama (an animated matte painting) that would be in view for a particular shot was loaded by the renderer.

For compositing, the crew primarily used Apple's Shake and ILM's own CompTime, with Adobe's After Effects handling some of the tricky 3D integration. In addition to footage of the miniature, the actors, and the CG elements, compositors layered in filmed elements that the principal photog-

raphy crew shot during the eruption of Mt. Etna. "The things that look like volcanoes erupting in the background really are volcanoes erupting," Geiger says. "We also used elements that we filmed of methacryl that we shot out of a hose and then color corrected in the comp." To set Anakin on fire, compositor Todd Vaziri painstakingly pieced together flame elements.

So what were the lessons learned? "Always use the simplest way possible," Geiger concludes. "We used miniatures where we could, real footage when we could, and when we had to go to CG, we kept it as simple as we possibly could."

Now, for his question: *I loved the whole graveyard sequence in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire which included the rebirth of Voldemort and the wand fight. What were some of the techniques used to create those effects?* ■

Barbara Robertson is an entertainment journalist who specializes in computer graphics, animation and visual effects. If you have a State of the Art question, e-mail her at robertson@animationmagazine.net.



DIGITAL MAGIC



Singing the praises of House of Move's mo-cap, iClone software and Asterisk's high art.

by Chris Grove

Few film technologies, I once thought, are as overrated as motion capture. Boy, was I wrong. Once just a poor man's shortcut to animating on the cheap, mo cap has become as big a player in the film business as that once-gnarly world of stop motion. A-list directors Peter Jackson (the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *King Kong*) and Robert Zemeckis (*Polar Express*, *Monster House*) have pushed mo cap to front and center as much as Nick Park has single-handedly transformed plasticine characters from the cold and slightly discomfiting to warm and reassuring. As the film business and video game worlds become increasingly intertwined, mo cap is making its presence felt for developers as well. L.A.-based **House of Moves** (a division of Vicon Motion Systems), for example, was recently tapped to provide motion-capture services for music game developer **Harmonix's *Guitar Hero*** (published by RedOctane, Christmas 2005 for the *PlayStation 2* platform).

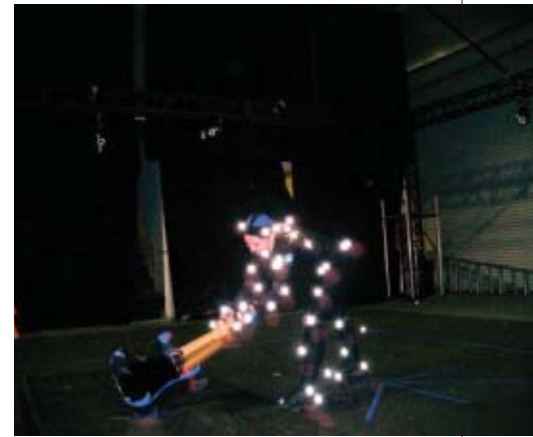
The scope of the work included performances for hand and full-body motions. The game lets players jam to some of the greatest rock anthems of all time using a guitar-shaped SG controller. *Guitar Hero* features songs made famous by such legendary artists as the Red Hot Chili Peppers, David Bowie, Ozzy Osbourne, Franz Ferdinand and The Ramones. The game offers four levels of difficulty and eight char-



acters, each with a unique look and style of playing. Players work up to higher and higher level concert venues—from small clubs to sold-out stadiums and arenas.

"We've done a lot of motion capture sessions at House of Moves and always get really good results," says Josh Randall, creative director, Harmonix. "You just show up and they're ready for anything." Among other things, the in-game graphics provide further audio-visual energy by making the players feel as if they are live on stage, backed up by a full band.

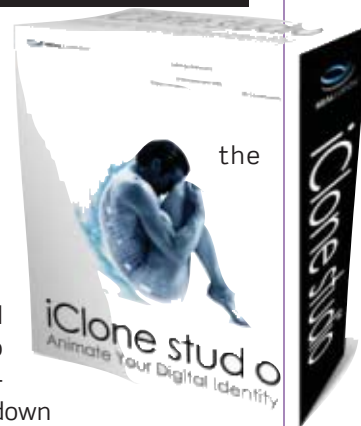
Both male and female performers were used for the project, recording hand and full-body performances in a variety of flamboyant guitar styles. Also captured were moves to help animate background band members (bass, drums, etc.) and props. The studio even staged guitars being thrown, caught and, in the final motion-capture session, smashed to lend that quintessential *The Who* moment to



Rock Idols: L.A.-based studio House of Moves delivered some hot mo-cap animation for Harmonix's ***Guitar Hero*** music game, which allows players to jam to their favorite rock anthems in various concert environments.

the proceedings.

On the other end of the equation, tools at the higher-tech end of the animation world continue to find new expressions down market, where weekend animators can make like a pro. Or at least feel like one. For one, **Reallusion, Inc.**, recently released its **iClone 3D** animation software. In brief, the software



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Tech Reviews

Alias Maya 7

Perhaps the most jaw-dropping CG news of the last ten years was Autodesk's acquisition of Alias, makers of Maya 3D animation software. While 3ds Max pretty much owns the game creation space, it never really developed the traction Maya had in the film market, so buying Alias was, in my opinion, a brilliant move on Autodesk's part. One thing people have been concerned about is a "merger" of the two apps, but from what I know about the two code bases, that would be practically impossible.

Maya 7 has many improved features, and extends functionality especially in modeling and character animation areas, which have long been its strengths. Ease of use has always been something Alias has attempted to improve upon, and Maya 7 gets it closer to that goal. Another bonus for character animators is MotionBuilder, which Alias acquired a while back and

integrated it well with the core Maya package.

Some of the new modeling tools include special normal mapping and scene optimization features, which allow for enhanced detail with lower polygon counts. Normal mapping has been improved as well, and although this is important for game designers, it also helps the film guys (and gals) out when scenes become especially complicated.

In the area of character animation, Maya has improved full body IK solvers, deformation tools and skinning features. Collaboration tools are also extended, allowing multiple animators to more efficiently work together on the same model(s). On the fly shaping of Blend Targets is also enhanced, and the pairing of MotionBuilder makes Maya a real character animation powerhouse.

Another staple in the Maya arsenal has been the use and rendering of fur and hair, which has also seen some improvement. Realistic dynamics can now be applied, and fur and hair can play well together. Paint Effects is also a "killer app" type tool, allowing you to create myriad effects, from particles, to grass, trees, just about anything you can think of. A new real time mesh preview feature also makes Paint Effects more usable, in what Alias describes as "near real time."

Maya also has a superior fluid effects system, and its new solvers make it easier to use than ever. In addition, the new package has an updated version of Maya Cloth, which is considered a leader in the cloth simulation field. Maya is available in three flavors, a free Personal Learning Edition, the Standard Version, and Unlimited, which includes all the modules like

fur, hair, fluid effects and so on.

Although the learning curve for Maya can be steep for some, it really is the 800-pound gorilla in the 3D space, and a force to be reckoned with. While many other 3D apps are totally capable of creating (and have) some spectacular work, Maya, since its inception has taken the lead on features, extensibility and flexibility. Autodesk should keep the Alias people happy and let them keep doing their thing. It's seemed to work pretty well so far.

Website: www.alias.com

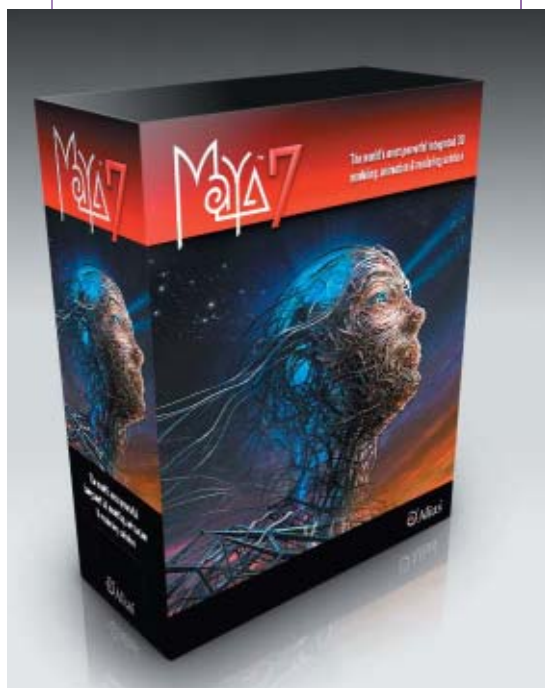
Price: \$1,999 (Maya Complete 7), \$6.999 (Maya Unlimited 7)

Wondertouch particlellusion 3.0 for OS X

One of the things about particle systems in 3D applications is that they require a lot of overhead from a rendering perspective. They can be difficult to set up, increase render times dramatically, and are easy to flub up. With Wondertouch's particlellusion software and the use of 2D sprites, the process of creating fire, smoke, snow, and other particle effects is more easily achieved in post production. The software also offers a level of control that you can't get inside your 3D application.

Using over 1,300 preset particle emitters which are fully customizable, the possibilities of producing effects are practically limitless. These effects are also previewable in real-time, which makes it much more intuitive to change and manipulate particle effects on the fly. Extending the functionality even further is the fact that all the "sprites" are two dimensional images which can

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Digital Magic

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gives users character templates and actions that the user can then personalize with their own face (or anyone else's for that matter), using the company's proprietary FaceTrix photo-to-3D transformation technology.

iClone promises to immerse users in a 3D environment with all the tools needed to construct fully animated 3D characters and 3D scenes, complete with props, scenery, outfits and motions.

Because the templates are pre-built, it's possible for real-time rendering of the user's customizations for, as the company promises, "instant 3D entertainment." The resulting animations are designed to work with video, on the web and for 3D content for DVD videos, games, mobile phones and 3D screensavers. The software is available in two versions: iClone Standard (\$79.95) and iClone Studio (\$179.95). Studio has expanded features including the iClone Motion Editor, BVH motion converter and full-screen digital video output for creating stunning cin-



The White Countess

ematic 3D animation. A free trial version is available online at www.reallusion.com/iclone/ic_trial.asp

And just to prove that you *can* teach an older director new tricks, this item: The Gotham-based animation whizzes of **Asterisk** have made a significant contribution to the latest Merchant/Ivory film **The White Countess**. The sequence of interest is an exotic animated 40-second journey that happens 20 minutes into the film. It begins when a young girl stops to look at a shadowbox on an amusement pier. The glass slide

slowly comes to life and the character gets to take a hoped-for journey to another town.

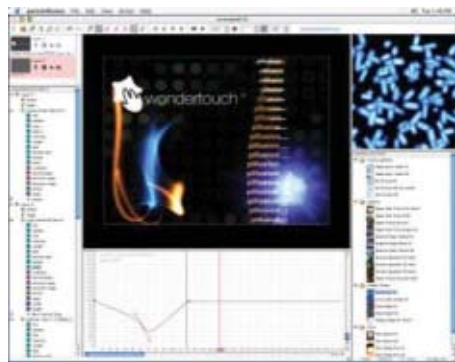
Called on to bring painted glass slides to life, the studio employed a mixture of classical tools and digital technology. Artwork was designed by noted New York-based Chinese artist Handong Quan, using a traditional fluid brush line with soft color washes. Asterisk then animated the characters by hand, rendering the line art on rice paper before scanning and digitally painting. 3-D camera moves

were designed using Alias/Wavefront Maya on a PowerMac G5.

Directed by James Ivory, *The White Countess* opened in the U.S. in December 2005. The Sony Pictures Classics title is set for a wider release in early 2006. The animation was produced and directed by Asterisk, Richard O'Connor and Brian O'Connell. Doug Compton, Ed Smith and Winnie Tom were Asterisk's animators. ■

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VISUAL EFFECTS



Tech Reviews

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be easily created (with alpha channels) in any kind of program like Photoshop. This gives you complete freedom to create your own particle effects for any project you may have.

Using a tool called Forces allows you to manipulate the particles to flow in

different directions, or act like they are being manipulated by gravity or other physical forces. Another cool feature is a tool called Super Emitters, which generates other emitters automatically from other particles, allowing for some amazing effects you won't find in other particle generation software. particlellusion also has support for multiple layers, affording artists even more control over various aspects in their projects.

Another feature I found quite impressive was Motion Blur, which works exceedingly well, and the product's ability to match particle colors to background footage is interesting as well. If you render your 3D animations with Alpha channels and Z depth information, it is also fairly easy to get particlellusion to let you

move emitters around and even behind objects and scene elements.

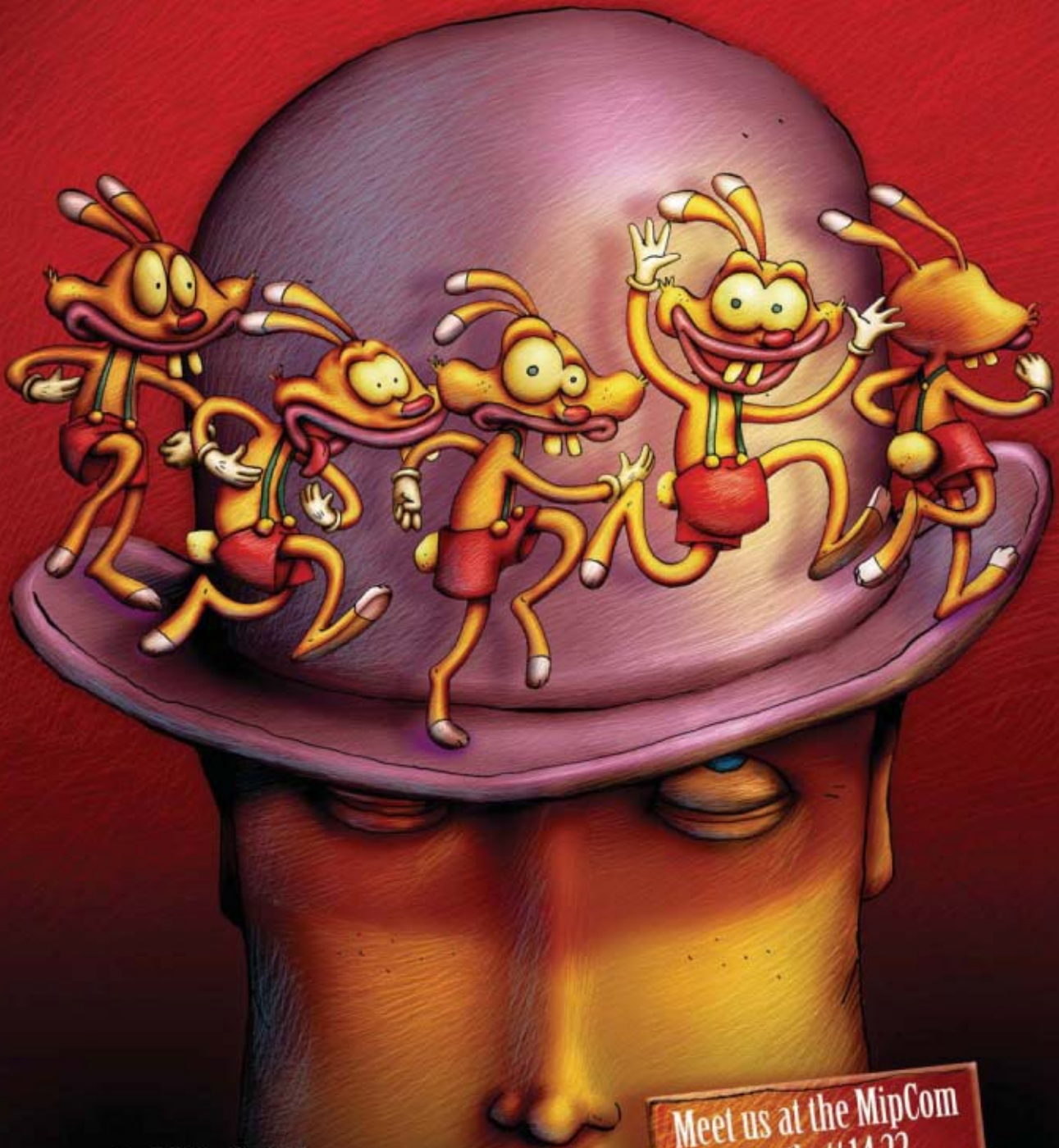
Does particlellusion replace the functionality of particle systems integrated into 3D applications? Sometimes, but not always. There are just certain things you have to do in the 3D engine that can't be replicated with a "2D" particle post system. That said, PI is a powerful particle engine, and depending on your needs and proper planning from a setup and rendering perspective, this software is fast, fairly inexpensive, fun to play with, and very versatile. It may not be for everyone, jobwise, but I guarantee if you download the demo and check it out for a while, you'll wonder where the hours have gone.

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DAVE School Delivers the Dark Knight

How a talented team from Orlando's CG school created a top-notch *Batman* adventure. **by Ellen Wolff**

One of the more unexpected attendees at last year's SIGGRAPH convention was veteran actor Dick Van Dyke, who was seen perusing the latest in computer animation alongside the usual technophiles. Van Dyke may be known for his role in the traditional vfx classic, *Mary Poppins*, but he also has a hobbyist's interest in digital graphics. (See Digital Magic, January 2006, www.animationmagazine.net.) So it's probably no surprise that he lent his voice talent to the computer-animated short, *Batman: New Times*.

What is notable, however, is that this 11-minute piece was created by students. The film was produced at the DAVE School in Orlando, Florida, where a one-year intensive curriculum in CG and digital effects requires that students create a group film using a professional-grade pipeline. For *Batman: New Times*, DAVE School founder Jeff Scheetz upped the ante by hiring a voice cast that also included Adam West, (as Batman) Mark Hamill (as The Joker) and Courtney

Thorne-Smith (as Catwoman). Scoring such name talent was an adventure in itself.

Van Dyke, who voiced the role of Commissioner Gordon, was the first actor on board, according to Scheetz. "That's a huge part of the story. Dick Van Dyke was the beginning and the end of it." The genesis was certainly unusual. Scheetz explains that DAVE School instructor William Vaughan used to work at NewTek software, makers of LightWave. "Dick was a big



LightWave user, and William has given him private computer animation lessons. I think he even bought a Video

Toaster in the early days. We thought he'd be awesome for Commissioner Gordon."

So Scheetz and Vaughan, who co-wrote and co-directed *Batman: New Times*, pursued Van Dyke and the project snowballed. The original TV *Batman*, Adam West, agreed to reprise the character. Mark Hamill of *Star Wars* fame turned out to be a huge animation fan and participated enthusiastically. The piece came together when *According to Jim* star Courtney Thorne-Smith signed on and, as Scheetz recalls, "really got into playing Catwoman."

The actors were recorded in Los Angeles under the direction of Michael Hack, who had done a lot of Warner Bros. *Batman* cartoons. Scheetz and Vaughan listened to the sessions via phone and contributed notes. After paying the actor fees, admits Scheetz, "We were out of money! Our accountant asked if we want to be in L.A. to record one actor, or stay in Florida and record three?"

Scheetz brought some Hollywood experience of his own to the venture. Before founding the DAVE School in 2000, he worked at the digital effects house Foundation Imaging. He expressed some relief that Warner Bros., which assertively protects brand-name properties like *Batman*, "knew about our project and allowed it to exist as a fan film. Marvel Comics also thought it was really cool."

Perhaps what contributed to such latitude was the toy-like nature of the animation. *Batman: New Times* was based on blocky little toys called Minimates, manufactured by New York-based Art Asylum. "They have a lot of DC Comics licenses," explains Scheetz, "as well

continued on page 52

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Batman: New Times' clever crew.

Name Game

continued from page 50

as Star Trek and Kiss. If it makes for a good Halloween costume you can probably make a Minimate out of it!"

Scheetz, who had done freelance commercial work for Art Asylum's line of *Batman* toys, was familiar with their models. While the company provided the CAD files that it uses to actually manufacture the toys, Scheetz observes, "The machining files give you every inch of every brick in an enormous amount of detail. It was way more than we needed. We realized that it would be a lot faster to look at the toys and rebuild them on a computer. They're Lego-like, so the modeling was pretty easy." Of course LightWave was the software of choice, along with DAZ's Mimic for LightWave, a lip-sync tool.

While the principal characters are toy-like, *Batman: New Times* contains extensive crowd simulation as well as a diverse collection of large sets. Scheetz remarks, "We wanted to see the bat cave and to have the Joker stage the world's largest stickup in Times Square on New Year's Eve. This is one of our most complete stories. It got to be twice as long as we usually make these things."

It was an ambitious undertaking for the crew of about twenty students. Scheetz adds that some DAVE School graduates were "pulled in to spend extra time to make it as good as it could be."

The three-month production was carried out at the DAVE School campus, which is located on the lot at Universal Studios in Orlando. "We believe that having our students work within a pipeline is an important part of their training." Having worked as a recruiter

while at Foundation Imaging, Scheetz says he saw far too many bad demo reels, even from graduates of animation schools. Short films like *Batman: New Times*, he explains, "Are really designed to provide quality demo reel footage for everybody involved."

For more info about The DAVE School, visit www.DAVEschool.com ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, animation and education.



Alejandro Parrillo hard at work on the DAVE school's Dark Knight Project.



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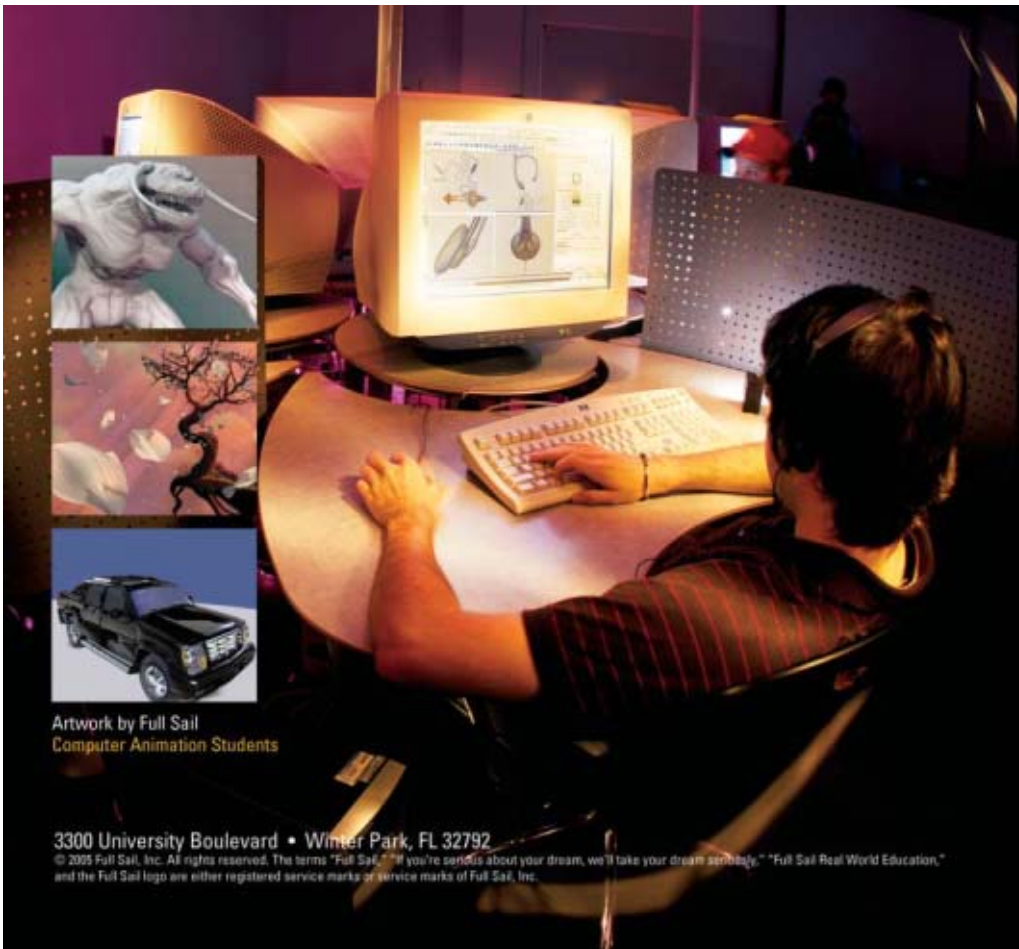
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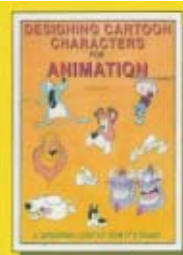
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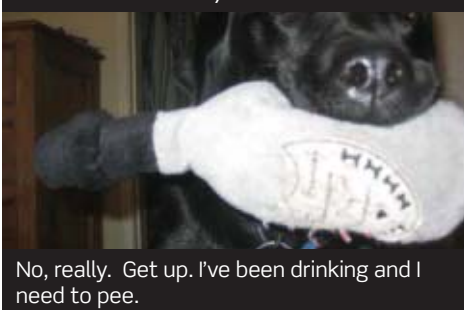
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